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JOHN MASON PECK, A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

BY

MATTHEW LAWRENCE
A. B. Shurtleff College, 1913

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Matthew Lawrence

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Solon J. Buck.
In Charge of Major Work

Evarts B. Greene
Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:

Committee
on
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INTRODUCTION

America is essentially a nation of democracy, but nowhere is it found so fully developed as in the great central valley of the Mississippi, "the section potentially most influential in the future of America"[1]. Conceived in the Atlantic East, born in a land boundless and free as the primeval forest, nurtured on the philosophy of the revolution, it has made its home with the pioneers. There it has maintained itself, and from thence its voice has gone out to all the earth. The spirit of the prairies has been the nations greatness. The marvel is that democracy, set free in a country untrammeled by social conventions, laws, and precedents,- a country whose very extent and limitless possibilities made prodigality second nature,- did not degenerate into anarchy and the grossest license.

The Valley of the Mississippi was peopled by a hardy class of pioneers from the East and South; people filled with a free and democratic spirit seeking homes in the new land so lavishly offered them.[2] Their ideals, as a whole, were not always high, their education extended, their civic natures developed, or their patriotism in a marked degree encouraging.[3]

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[1]Turner, "Significance of the Frontier in Am. Hist.", in Wis. State Hist. Soc. Proc., 1892-1894, 159.

[2]Pooley, Settlement of Illinois, 309.

[3]Ibid., 551-558.

Among them, however, were the few who were mastered by convictions; the few who did not live for self alone, but also for their nation and their God. It was the guiding influence of these which made American democracy a blessing rather than a curse; it was their altruism, their whole-souled efforts for the general welfare of others, which made the Mississippi Valley the real America.

"In the wild and rapid whirl of events in our country we are too apt to neglect or forget history. 'Humanity sweeps onward', but the recollections of men and the histories of peoples and nations are too often buried in forgetfulness and oblivion. To rescue a name worthy to be remembered and honored, to recall great events, to look back upon the deeds of those gone before us, are objects worthy of all our consideration."[4]

Such is the purpose of this sketch. For the majority of persons, the name of Dr. John Mason Peck is"buried in forgetfulness and oblivion". In all his forty years in Illinois, Dr. Peck never held a public office, but men bear testimony of him in these unmistakable words: "He is the man whose publications and correspondence have led more settlers into this State than any other ten men";[5] "Mr. Peck was not only a pioneer, but a master spirit among the pioneers. Perhaps no man of the class did more than he to guide the thoughts, mould the manners and form the institutions of the West;"[6] "He was beyond question, one of the strongest

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[4]Washburne, Sketch of Edward Coles, 119.
[5]Dr. Lyman Beecher.
[6]Dr. J. B. Jeter, quoted by Babcock, Memoir, 346.

forces for intelligence and righteousness in the whole Mississippi Valley".[7]

Surely such a character is deserving of greater recognition from the people of his adopted state than he has received. To present to them the events of the life of this noble pioneer, and to show his place and part in Western history is the purpose which inspires the writer.

When failing health showed Dr. Peck that he would be unable to complete his great life-work, The Moral Progress of the Mississippi Valley, he began a series of reminiscences which embodied considerable of the material on the West which he had been gathering for forty years. He arranged that this work should be finished after his death by an old friend, Dr. Rufus Babcock, and for that purpose left to him all his journals, diaries and manuscripts - an immense amount of material.[8] From this Babcock wrote the Memoir of John Mason Peck, D.D., which was published in 1864 - just fifty years ago.

Babcock wrote from the viewpoint of a minister and emphasized Peck's religious labors to such an extent that many important events, especially of a semi-public nature, are made mere incidents; in many places the work is unintentionally misleading and in others erroneous to an inexcusable extent. Aside from a small volume by Gov. John Reynolds called Friendship's Offering, it is the only biography of Peck which has been written. There seems,therefore, to be a place for this sketch of his life.

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[7]Greene, Pioneers of Civilization in Illinois, p. 17.
[8]Draper Mss., 1Z25, 1Z30.

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE (1789 - 1815)

When the good ship Defiance in 1634 beat her solitary way across the still almost trackless Atlantic, she bore to the shores of New England a man and woman in whom beat the true hearts of pioneers; they were Paul Peck and his wife Martha.[1] Among the great-great-grandchildren of this pair was an eldest son who in true Puritan style was given the scriptural name Asa. He was born March 8, 1744; stirring days filled his youth and during the war he no doubt shouldered his flintlock and joined the ranks of the patriots. At the close of the war he moved with his widowed mother from their home in Berlin, Connecticut, to the parish of South Farms, Litchfield. Three years later he married Hannah Farnum, who was born near there on July 25, 1755. Their only child, born October 31, 1789, was given the unpretentious name of John Mason.[2] John's birth was perhaps the only noteworthy event of his boyhood. No unusual precocity made him at school the teacher's pride, or the recipient therefore, of cutting jibes from less fortunate but no less envious schoolmates.

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[1] Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, 402, note; Babcock, Memoir of John Mason Peck, 14, note.

[2] Babcock, Memoir, 14. Litchfield County is particularly distinguished for the religious leaders it gave to the county. Among them were Samuel J. Mills, the Collins brothers, Theron Baldwin, Lyman Beecher and John M. Peck - all influential in early Illinois history. Other famous sons were Ethan Allen, Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Oliver Walcott, Jr., John Pierpont and Charles Loring Brace. Aaron Burr lived there during 1774-1775, and Lyman Beecher preached at the town of Litchfield from 1810 to 1826.

Indeed, he himself informs us that he was a dull and stupid lad, and found much trouble with his p-s and q-s and ing-s. As shall be seen, however, he was never a man to boast or sing his own praises and another explanation than that of plain stupidity is more in accord with the facts.[3]

Winning the war for Independance did not usher in a Utopia and Asa Peck was one who realized this fully. He was poor, and lame as well - perhaps from a wound received in the war - and as soon as John was old enough to work his help was needed on the little forty-acre farm. Thus his schooling, even in the proud state of Connecticut which boasted of her schools, was short in years and these years were of but a few months in winter. That he made excellent use of his time both during and after his years in school for his own personal improvement, is plainly shown in the earliest of his papers which have been preserved. His command of English and of the rules of grammar is remarkable in view of his lack of youthful advantages. When still young he began keeping diaries; in later years these proved a wonderful source of information, useful both to himself and to historians.[4]

The winters of 1807-8-9 Peck spent in conducting a school, from which he received but a meager salary, and as was customary, "boarding round" among the families of his employers. The opportunity for self-improvement, and the advantage of being intimately associated with many families was a splendid apprenticeship for the life-work which he was destined to choose. In

[3]Babcock, Memoir, 15.
[4]Babcock, Memoir, 15.

later years he appreciated to the full what these winters had meant to his life.[5]

Asa Peck brought up his son to be a regular attendant at the parish church and accustomed to morning and evening family worship in the home. John was little concerned about spiritual things, however, till the winter of 1807, when on the evening of December 15, he was led, chiefly out of curiosity he tells us, to attend a revival meeting about three miles from his home. During the evening the words of the minister brought to him the conviction that he was not living in the proper relation to God. Writing about the event some four years later, he said, "My distress increased and my burden became heavier until the end of the week when I was delivered and found a peace of mind and a joy in God which I had never before felt. Insensibly my heart was drawn out to love and praise the Lord. I looked around on the works of creation with a satisfaction and sweet delight before unknown, for they seemed manifestly declaring the glory of God." Following his conversion he became a member of the Congregational church. In its work he took an active part, acquiring the habit of extemporaneous speaking and praying in social meetings during a "Young People's Conference" held at Litchfield. Soon he came to feel that he was called to give his services to spreading the kingdom of God, but conscious that his education did not fit him for the ministry, and that his parents were becoming old and greatly dependent upon him, he reluctantly gave

[5]Babcock, Memoir, 15.

up the idea.[6]

Among the converts of those December meetings in 1807 was a girl named Sarah Paine. She was born in Greene County, New York, on January 31, 1789. When twelve years old, the death of her mother left Sarah as mistress of her father's home, which included the care of three younger children. The excellent way in which she took up and carried out her duties, won the admiration of all her friends. In 1803 her father remarried and "Sally", as she was called, went to live with her mother's parents at Litchfield, Connecticut. On joining the church there she became personally acquainted with John Peck. Their acquaintance "resulted in esteem for each other," says Peck, and on the eighth of May, 1809, they were married.[7]

The first two years after their marraige the young couple lived at the Peck home near Litchfield, John working the farm and in the winter, conducting a school. Here their first child, a son named Eli Prince, was born July 28, 1810. The following spring they moved to the neighborhood of Windham, Greene County, New York. There they were almost pioneers, living in the wilderness with only eight families in a circle of three miles radius.[8]

For some time the Pecks had entertained serious doubts as to the scriptural anthority for the doctrine of Pedobaptism or infant baptism. At New Durham, some five miles from their new home, was a Baptist organization and thither by a winding

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[6]Babcock, Memoir, 16-18, 21.
[7]Ibid., 19.
[8]Ibid., 22.

path over the mountains, the couple with their thirteen months old babe, took their way on Sunday morning of the tenth of August. They met with a cordial welcome and the perplexing question was discussed with congregation as well as pastor. As a result, they accepted the Baptist view, and on Saturday, September 13, they again crossed the mountain to attend the regular quarterly Covenant meeting of the New Durham church. Peck and his wife were then given the opportunity of relating their experience and conviction, after which each was subjected to a careful examination on points of doctrine and experience. At its conclusion all repaired to a nearby stream where the pair were baptized.[9]

Even before that day the members of the church had urged Peck to enter the ministry, a field which had made a strong appeal to him ever since his conversion. On Saturday, October 12, 1811, he was asked at the Covenant meeting of the church for his views and feelings on preaching the gospel. After his reply the church voted to have him "improve his gift" among them until they were satisfied that he was divinely called to the work. He was not given much time to prepare himself, being called upon to conduct the services of the following day, but having often planned sermons, he was not wholly unprepared, and in the presence of a large congregation spoke from Mark 16:15, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". The choice of this verse as his first text was prophetic. Little did he then dream that he was to spend the major

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[9]Babcock, Memoir, 21-26.

portion of his life in obedience to the great commission, but the ideas were already at work, which in a few years were to take him far from home in the service of the Master.[10]

Thru the following winter Peck frequently supplied in the pulpit of the Catskill church. In April he paid a visit to his old home in Litchfield, preaching several times on the way. Soon after his return he moved to Catskill to conduct a school there and was induced to preach for the church, without salary, whenever there was no one else to conduct the services. He was always given the penny collection, however, and thus at the end of his first four years and a half of experience had preached one hundred seventy four times and received forty three dollars and three cents.[11]

By this time the Catskill church was so well pleased with him and his ability that a council for his ordination was called to meet on June 9, 1813. The examination proving satisfactory, the ordination sermon was preached and he was given the right hand of fellowship by his old friend and neighbor, the Rev. Hervey Jenks. His extended liberties were soon made use of as on the next Sunday he baptized several converts and administered the Lord's Supper; and within a week he performed his first marriage ceremony, receiving one dollar as his fee.[12]

The financial returns from Peck's school at Catskill were very small indeed and with the idea of earning more he began

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[10] Babcock, Memoir, 26.
[11] Ibid., 30, 35.
[12] Ibid., 36.

an evening school also. This extra work proved too much, and his health broke down so that for some time it was thought that he would die. On his recovery he found both schools broken up, but at the end of the year (1813) the church in Amenia, Dutchess County, called him to its pastorate with such support promised as would enable him to give up his school and devote his entire time to church work and the improvement of his own education, While he had made warm friends in Catskill, it was with a joyful heart that he took up his new charge the following February, for he wanted nothing more than the opportunity to devote his entire time to some church and to study. A fortunate opportunity for the latter soon came to him thru his forming an acquaintance with Daniel H. Barnes, principal of Dutchess Academy in Poughkeepsie. This kind and generous scholar offered to teach him the reading of the Greek New Testament, and other kindred subjects. For weeks he worked four or five days out of the seven in earnest study under this excellent tutelage.[13]

The remuneration from the church did not prove sufficient for the needs of Peck's family, however, and in November, 1815, he opened a school, giving notice to the church the same week, that his pastorate would terminate at the end of the year. His labors during these two years covered a wide field, for he attended many associations and often delivered lectures and addresses in other neighborhoods than his own; he carried on correspondence, too, with many persons, among them being a minister

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[13]Babcock, Memoir, 39.

James E. Welch,- whom he had not yet met but who was later to become his companion and co-worker.[14]

[14] Babcock, Memoir, 45-47.

CHAPTER II

THE WESTERN MISSION (1816-1810)

In June, 1815, Peck attended the Warwick Association and there met Luther Rice who was stirring up the people in the interest of missions. The appeal struck a resonant chord in Peck's nature. Long before, he had recorded in his diary a wish to spend his life in missionary service, saying, "under the immediate Government of the United States, there is an abundant field for missionary labor. How I would rejoice if Providence would open a door for my usefulness and labors in this way". After the service he took Rice to his home where their talk together resulted in Peck's decision to enter a mission field as soon as he could prepare for it[1].

For this preparation he went in April, 1816, to the school kept by Dr. Staughton in Philadelphia and there took up the study of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, prepared sermon outlines, and attended lectures on medicine, botany, and various other subjects. When the school closed for the summer he entered the service of the Massachusetts Missionary Society and traveled for it in western New York, but November found him again at his studies in the school.[2] The students there got practical experience in religious work by conducting Sunday-schools and preaching in neighboring churches. Working in this way Peck took part on January 1, 1817, in the organization at Great Valley,Pennsylvania,

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1 Babcock, Memoir, 38, 42. 2. Ibid., 55.

of the "American Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel", and delivered the address of the occasion.[3]

When Luther Rice and the Judsons became Baptists on their way to the Indian Mission field, there was no Baptist mission board in America under which they might labor, so Rice returned to bring about such an organization. As a result of his activities many local mission societies were formed and a national society was organized in 1814 under the name, "The Triennial Convention of the Baptist denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions".[4] This Convention held its second meeting in Philadelphia, May 7-14, 1817. The question of establishing a mission in the Missippi Valley was settled in the affirmative when John M. Peck and James E. Welch offered themselves for the post. On recommendation of Dr. Staughton they were accepted and on May 14 were formally "set apart" for the work of the "Western Mission", as the new station was named. For the expenses of the trip to St. Louis and the organization of the mission, the sum of one thousand dollars was appropriated by the Board of Missions, which was the permanent organization of the Convention.

The instructions issued to them constitute a document of importance as showing what was expected of them in the field, and were in part as follows:

"The Board ... at present request you to commence your missionary career at St. Louis or in its vicinity. The Board feels the propriety and importance of your endeavoring

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[3]There is a printed copy of the original constitution in the Illinois Baptist Historical Collection, Alton, Illinois.
[4]Triennial Baptist Register, No.2. (1836)
[5]American Baptist Magazine, I, 133, 174.

to establish a school or schools in that neighborhood. . . . They wish you also to collect such scattered brethren through districts of the country, as you may be able, and to encourage and assist their formation into regular churches of Christ. It is not improbable that from such brethren and churches, men of God may be found who will rejoice to become your associates in the work before you. The Board is particularly desirous that the Fox, the Osage, the Kansas and other tribes of Indians should engage your particular zeal. In proportion as the Lord shall confirm the capacity of the Board, and as brethren shall be found willing to become adjutors, they will be happy in enlarging the number of Western laborers. . . .

Convince the Indians, and all around them, that your designs are amicable; that you feel for them as fellow immortals; that you covet not their lands, but their souls. . . . Let them be satisfied that the Missionaries of the Cross are sincere, when they say, 'We desire not yours, but you', and good will be accomplished.

. . . While the Board will feel itself charged to minister to your temporal necessities, it is believed, dear brethren, that you will realize the conviction that it will become you to exercise a strict frugality. You are hereby authorized, as circumstances and prudence may suggest, to collect what you can from the friends of Zion, for the support of Missions and let an account of your receipts and expenditures be prepared in time for insertion in our annual Report. We pray that you may abound in personal and domestic religion. Your example will speak with a voice as distinct and instructive as your public ministrations. . . .

You will find it of advantage to keep regular journals. Exhibit the general aspect of the country, and the temper of the people you may visit. Let your communications to the Board be frequent.

We are, in sincerity and affection, your brethren. Signed by order of the Board, Wm. Staughton, Secr'y."[6]

When the session closed Peck returned to his home and began preparations for his trip to the west. The twelve hundred mile journey to St. Louis seemed very long in those days and one who undertook it with a family knew that before them lay many weeks of hardship and the friends and relatives left behind might never be seen again. On Friday, July 25, 1817, Peck said

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[6]American Baptist Magazine, I, 189.

farewell to his old father and mother, and with his wife and three children left Litchfield on the first stage of the journey. They traveled in a one-horse wagon, and the trip to Philadelphia occupied ten days. From there the route passed thru Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Zanesville, and Chillicothe. Late in October the Ohio was crossed into Kentucky and there they were met by Welch and his wife, who accompanied them thru Lexington and Louisville to Shawneetown. The first views of Illinois pioneers gave a bad impression. On the second day which they spent in the state, (Saturday, November 8, 1817) Peck wrote in his diary, "I have seen enough of Shawneetown to justify what is reported of it as a most abandoned place . . . I never saw a place more destitute of religious instruction."[7]

Heavy rains at this time made land travel, for a few days, impossible. Early Sunday morning, however, a boat passed, bound for St. Louis, and Peck decided to proceed on it with his family, leaving the horse and wagon with a brother of Mrs. Peck, that he and the Welches might drive to St. Louis when the roads became passible. Early in the morning of December 1, the trip from Litchfield ended. Mr. Welch had already reached St. Louis and had procured for the Peck family a single room - the only available tenement in the city.[8] There Peck lay for many days at the point of death from a fever contracted at Cape Girardeau.

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[7]Babcock, Memoir, 70 - 76.

[8]Ibid., 70 - 76.

Missouri.[9] Soon after he had recovered sufficiently to undertake some mission duties the hearts of the Peck family were gladdened by the birth on February 11, of a son whom they named William Carey.

The section into which the two missionaries had come was truly in need of the refining influences of educated ministers. The population was made up of two classes: floaters and settlers. The former lived a hand-to-mouth existence, chiefly by hunting and fishing, and moved on constantly so as to be on the frontier, away from civilization; the other class, the backbone of the country, cultivated their farms and lived in comfortable houses. Most of the people had little education and nothing to read; practically all clothing was made in the home. On the farms there was little want, the lack in the delicacies and comforts of the more settled east being offset by the ease and cheapness with which all necessities might be procured . Corn was ground at a mill on some nearby stream, and corn-meal was one of the chief articles of diet. Little money was seen or needed. The moral situation showed evidence of the laxity and freedom of pioneer life. Every community had its distillery, for whiskey was needed to keep the people cool in summer and warm in winter. The Sabbath was a day for hunting and jollification, in the latter of which, whiskey often played a leading part. Different conditions, however, could hardly be expected.

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[9]Babcock, Memoir, 84

Writing from St. Louis, Dec. 28, 1817, to the Latter Day Luminary, I, (p. 148) Welch said, "Be not surprised if in my next, I shall have to perform the painful task of announcing the death of my partner in missionary labor".

Very little religious work was being done and it was thus very easy and natural for the people to become lax in their observance of the Sabbath and, to a certain extent, in morals generally.[10]

Still, here and there was an occasional church whose existence was due to a demand for it. In the neighborhood of Cape Girardeau, Missouri, seven Baptist churches had grouped themselves into the Bethel Association, in 1815. The first Protestant preacher to cross the Mississippi was the Rev. John Clark, a Methodist, who came into Illinois in 1797, but crossed the river in 1798. Early in the next century he became a Baptist and helped form the churches of the Bethel Association.[11]

The first Protestant minister to enter Illinois, was James Smith, a Baptist, who came from Kentucky in 1787; the next was Joseph Lillard, a Methodist, who came in 1793. The first of any demomination to remain permanently, however, was the Baptist minister, James Bagley, who came in the spring of 1796. He organized the first Protestant church in the state, at New Design, that same year, with twenty-eight members. Another of the early Baptists was James Lemen, converted by the preaching of the Rev. Josiah Dodge, who was in Illinois in 1793-1794. The great Methodist bishop, McKendree, came to Illincis in 1807. The French Catholics had been in the state from very early times, and there were here and there a few Dunkards.[12]

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[10]Patterson, Early Society in Southern Illinois, 101 et seq. Shambaugh, "The West and the Pioneers", in Wisconsin. Historical Society, Proceedings, 1910, 133 et seq.
[11]Peck, Life of Father Clark, the Pioneer Preacher.
[12]Reynolds, Pioneer History of Illinois, Chap.6.

From this brief sketch it is plain that the people as a whole had not been reached regularly for religious service.

Sometime in December, 1817, Mr. Welch rented a room back of a store and in it opened a school. On Wednesday evenings and Sundays religious services were held there. From Peck's own description of St. Louis, the city in winter seems to have been an awful place. It was crowded by traders, trappers, and floaters, whose morals were anything but commendable, and the French Catholic residents were in many cases but little better.[13] There were a few conscientious Christians, however, and the Baptists among them were readily attracted to the services in the little school-room. In February, eleven of these presented letters and other testimonials of their good standing, adopted a covenant and articles of faith, and on the eighth, under the guidance of Peck and Welch, organized themselves into the first Baptist church in St. Louis.[14]

On March 1, the same body organized itself into the "Western Baptist Mission Society" and elected Welch secretary and treasurer. Its object was to promote the Western Mission by raising funds. Meanwhile the members had started a subscription to build a meeting-house, the cost of which they estimated at seven thousand dollars. It was a noble undertaking for a band of eleven persons, but they urged the matter with so much vigor that by April 25, over three thousand dollars had been raised, and a forty by sixty lot, at the corner of Third

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[13]Babcock, Memoir, 87 et seq.
[14]Latter Day Luminary, I, 89.

and Market Streets, purchased for six hundred dollars.[15]

On March 4, the missionaries carried out another project which had been close to their hearts since their arrival, viz., the establishment of a school for the negroes. Sunday to the slaves was a day of change and of rest. They were grossly ignorant and their low state of morals was attributable to this rather than to an innate disposition to viciousness. The object of the school was to teach them to read the Bible and memorize verses. It opened successfully with an attendance of fourteen, which in two months increased to nearly one hundred, ranging in age from five to forty years. In addition to this Mrs. Peck planned to open a school at her home in May for negro women.[16]

The most direct influence of their labors among the whites was evidenced on the first Sunday in April when two converts were baptized. Peck's account of it is interesting: "As the season of baptism mentioned above was the first ever witnessed in St. Louis, it excited public attention. The shore of the majestic Mississippi was lined with spectators at an early hour. . . . From the deck of a vessel, like our great Master, I preached on the occasion from Acts 8:12. Two Presbyterian ministers were present. Many of the Catholics attended, among them were two of their priests."[17]

In the same letter a further expansion of the work was shown as he wrote:

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[15]Babcock, Memoir, 93; Latter Day Luminary, I, 243

[16]Letter dated St. Louis, Mar. 28, 1818 in Latter Day Luminary, I, 89.

[17]Letter dated St. Louis, June 15, 1818, in American Baptist Magazine, I, No. 1.

We have enlarged the plan of our school, and laid the foundation of a useful institution, under the name of the 'Western Mission Academy'. This institution at present, consists of three departments, which we intend to increase and extend into the country and to more distant villages.

1. The first department embraces those scholars who pay for their tuition, and contains at present about forty, of which five are the children of Catholics. 2. The second department is a free school limited at present to ten scholars, all except one, the children of French Catholics, and who without this means would grow up in vice without useful knowledge . . . . [3] The third department is our African Sunday School. Were I to speak only of the advantages of learning to read, and the temporal good of this unhappy race, with the progress that some have made, much might be said. From the first beginning we let it be understood that religious instruction would be our primary object. To prevent any difficulty slaves were required to bring certificates from their masters, tho we did not wish to confine ourselves to this rule in every instance. By this prudent measure, the approbation of many citizens of the first respectability was secured.

That all were not satisfied tho, with this arrangement, is shown by the following letter received by Peck and Welch:

Gentlemen: As you have but lately arrived in this country and perhaps may not be acquainted with our laws, I would beg leave to refer you to the 7th section of an act for the regulation of slaves, and leave it to yourselves to decide, whether or not you have incurred heavy penalties by your negro school.

It might also be made a question by the patriot and philanthropist, whether it is prudent and humane to give instruction to those who must be made by it either more miserable or rebellious. I warn you that the sanctity of the clerical character will not here screen the offenders against the law from punishment. Yours truly, Justice. [18]

As outlined in their plans, the missionaries were carrying out their instructions in preaching and teaching. The field was a large one, however, with St. Louis only as its center. As soon as things were put on a safe basis at St.Louis

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[18] Duncan, History of the Baptists in Missouri.

as headquarters, Peck started to visit the scattered Baptist settlers of his field. From June 20 on, various excursions were made into Illinois, where he tried to visit all the Baptists in the American bottom, and to learn the condition of the schools. Concerning the latter he said "I found at least three-fourths of all the masters and schools were public nuisances and ought to have been indicted by the Grand Jury". One family visited had not seen a Baptist preacher for eight or ten years; but almost universally he was received with all the hospitality the people knew how to exercise. When there was a group of settlers in a sort of village Peck would collect them in some house and preach; at the scattered Baptist homes he stopped long enough for a religious conversation and prayer.[19]

In September, 1818, the first extensive trip was made into Missouri when Peck visited the Bethel Association. The important accomplishment of the trip lay in the successful promotion of a plan for extending the gospel and public school among both whites and Indians. It was approved by the Association on October 24 (as it had been also by the Illinois Association two weeks earlier), and the organization was completed under the name, "The United Society for the spread of the gospel", when delegates from the associations met at Femme Osage, St. Charles County. Its object was to aid the Western Mission thru creating an interest in mission work among the people and in raising funds for the support of schools and

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[19]Babcock, Memoir, 94-103, 123.

missionaries. Peck was appointed agent and superintendent and authorized to obtain subscribers, collect money, organize auxiliary societies, establish schools and promote the general objects of the society. It was no small addition to the responsibilities already upon him, but he went to work with his usual vigor and spent weeks in traveling thruout Missouri and Illinois, enduring great hardships, fording icy streams and frequently riding all day without food. The work was done in the cause which he loved and he was not a man to pause for hardships.[20]

In the neighborhood of the Bethel Association lived a number of Creek and Muskogee Indians and on this trip Peck had his first opportunity to examine into their condition and the possibility of mission work and schools among them. A meeting with the leaders of the tribes secured their consent to have a school established in their midst. Before this was done, however, John Ficklin came from the Kentucky Mission Society to get some of the Missouri Indian children for a school in the former state. Peck's plan was abandoned when the Indians sent a number of their children with Mr. Ficklin.[21]

When Peck and Welch first surveyed the field, they saw the need of missionaries among the Indians in the Northwest. To accomplish much it was necessary that some one go and live among them. "It is asked", wrote Peck to an eastern magazine, "who will submit to such hardships and privations as such a mode would require? The reply is 'Here am I. Send me.' All I

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[20]Constitution in Latter Day Luminary, I, 304; American Baptist Magazine, I, no. 11.

[21]Peck in Latter Day Luminary, I, 303; Babcock, Memoir, 111 et seq

ask is two pious, devoted young men, whose constitutions and dispositions will suffer them to brave the dangers of the wilderness, to accompany me as preachers or teachers . . . and I will venture my life as soon as the Board may think it fit. Every season, a number of the citizens of this village proceed up the Missouri from 800 to 2000 miles . . . spend seven or eight months with the Indians . . . learn their language, etc. and all for a few paltry Beaver skins or Buffalo hides. And shall a Christian, a missionary, refuse to submit to like inconvenience, for the sake of immortal souls and the glory of God?"[22]

The missionary knows no seasons,and on December 12, Peck set out on a two-months' tour. There was sickness in his family at the time, but he had sent forward engagements, and as an itinerant missionary he felt it his duty to keep them and trust his family to the care of Providence. On this trip he first met Daniel Boone, and had a long talk with him. Not long after that he rode from daylight till sun-set, and then preached to a number who had gathered to hear him, without any food having passed his lips. Such a tour as this usually took him from three hundred to eight hundred miles and gave him a wide acquaintance with the country people.[23]

One of the earliest plans of the two missionaries was to establish a school of higher education, not the least of whose objects being to educate those who might be found in the West desirous of becoming preachers of the gospel. Early in 1819 it seemed feasible to undertake the establishment of such an in-

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[22]Peck to editors American Baptist Magazine, I, no. 11.
[23]Babcock, Memoir, 125 et seq.

stitution. For a number of reasons, it was thought best not to locate it in St. Louis. Prices there were extraordinarily high and it was necessary that the school be economical. Several suggested places were visited in order to examine into their fitness as the seat of a boarding school, Alton, Illinois, and St. Charles, Missouri having the preference. In March the latter place was decided upon as there was already a school there in charge of a Baptist named James Craig who was eager to teach in the higher school. The approval of the board was secured as well as an appropriation of two hundred dollars to purchase a site for the school and one of four hundred dollars to buy a farm near by for its use.[24]

It was decided that Peck should have charge of the new school, which was called "St. Charles Academy", and on April 8, 1819, he moved his family there and the new work began. He did not confine himself to the school, however, as Craig was able to take charge of the thirty to forty students, and Peck gave most of his time to itinerant work, occasionally establishing a Sunday-School or a mite society and taking collections to support the various lines of work without aid from the missionary board in Philadelphia. It was hoped that the tuition from the academy would prove a considerable help, but in this they were greatly disappointed as expenses practically equalled the income.[25]

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[24]Babcock, Memoir, 152; DeBlois, The Pioneer School, 23.
[25]Babcock, Memoir, 163.

It is not to be supposed that, aside from discomforts of travel, the two men of the Western Mission had found their work smooth sailing all the way. The work on the church in St. Louis had proceeded only to the completion of the basement which was used as a school room and church. Many persons in the town did all they could to hinder and the work stopped for lack of funds.[26] Outside St. Louis their work met frequent obstruction and opposition. There were in the west at this time, many who opposed missions; some because of their selfish, unchristian natures and other thru ignorance and a belief that missions were wrong. Churches and Associations were held to be scriptural but no other organization - including missions - was authorized by the word of God and must therefore be forbidden. Perhaps worse than either of these classes, however, were many uneducated preachers whose real objection was expressed in the words of one of them when he was pressed to explain his opposition, as follows: "Well, if you must know, Brother Moderator, you know the big trees in the woods overshadow the little ones; and these missionaries will be all great, learned men, and the people will all go to hear them preach, and we shall all be put down. That's the objection." It would be a difficult problem to determine why such men ever entered the ministry.[27]

[26]From a letter from Peck to Rev. Mr. Sharp, Boston, Aug. 18, 1818, published in the American Baptist Magazine I, 450, it is seen that work on the St. Louis church began without waiting for the whole amount of money to be subscribed, and early in August, 1818, the foundation was finished. It was planned to erect a building with a large basement to be used as a school-room, and the first floor as a church. From lack of funds the church remained in an uncompleted condition for several years, but at length was finished according to these original plans.

[27]Babcock, Memoir, 109 et seq.

On September 28, 1820, Mary Anne Peck was born, but the joy of the home was shortly saddened by the death on October 5, of the oldest boy. Just a little more than ten years old, he was becoming a great comfort to his mother in the long and frequent absences of her husband. It was a sore and bitter trial for Mr. Peck, but his faith and trust are shown by his writing in his diary on that day, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." Mrs. Peck's brother who had met them at Shawneetown died two days later, and Peck soon became very ill, but just when the physicians had given up hope of his recovery, he was almost miraculously restored. These trials only served to strengthen and increase his faith in God, and tho he seemed to be wholly consecrated before, there was such a marked change in his preaching and praying that some of his friends thought it a sign that his work on earth was nearly done.[28]

The Journal of the Western Mission, (kept regularly by Peck), under date of July 9, 1820, states that official notice had been received from the secretary of the board, that the mission was closed. Three reasons were given: 1.Lack of funds; 2. Immigration would supply all the preachers which were needed; 3. The opposition of anti-mission Baptists in the West. Welch was requested to continue at St. Louis and Peck was directed to move to Ft. Wayne and labor with McCoy among the Indians. Some months after this word was received, Peck wrote

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[28]Babcock, Memoir, 162 et seq.

to persuade the board to rescind this action, but without success. Thus ended the Western Mission. "In the endeavor to embrace too many objects,- ministerial education, Indian reform and improvement, and Domestic Missions as well as Foreign Missions, and all without even one mind then devoted to its executive functions,- the very multifariousness embarrassed and almost broke down the whole organization."[29]

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[29]Missionary Jubilee, 366

CHAPTER III

"THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS" (1820-1829)

The two laborers had laid a solid foundation for the future and had already accomplished much direct good. The longer they remained the broader became their influence and their ability for extending the work, so the closing of the mission was a severe blow. Mr. Welch went to another field, but Mrs. Peck's health made it out of the question for her to move to Ft. Wayne, and the idea of leaving such a needy field around St. Louis altogether destitute was so impossible with Peck that he decided to stay there, make a living in some way, and devote what time remained to his former work. Mr. Craig had already proved a rogue, instead of the splendid, impressive Christian which he seemed at first acquaintance and the school at St. Charles was given up.[1]

After a correspondence with the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society, Peck was appointed their agent on March 12, 1822, at a salary of five dollars per week for the time actually spent in their service. The work was similar to that which he had been carrying on before, tho the society was unable to begin or support schools.[2]

In April Peck bought a half section of government land at Rock Spring, Illinois, and by the help of kind neighbors was able to build quickly such buildings as were needed. The house

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[1]Babcock, Memoir, 170.
[2]Ibid., 171.

was a one story building of five rooms. Part of the land was cultivated to provide support for the family so that Peck could devote more of his time to church work. He had now decided to confine his labors chiefly to Illinois. Near him were his friends the Lemens and during his stay here he was to form many lasting friendships with the prominent men of the denomination and public officers of the state. Rock Spring, thru him, was soon to become known all over the country. Such is the power of a strong personality.[3]

On May 26, he gathered some neighboring Baptists at his home and organized them into a church. A few days later he set out on a twenty days' tour thru Illinois and Indiana. After a few days at home he was again off, this time thru Missouri. So the time went in visiting and preaching. While in Vandalia in December the Legislature adjourned and asked him to preach in their hall. The sermon given was only the first of many sermons and addresses which he was to deliver in the Illinois statehouse.[4] Among the converts during the next years' work was Thomas Carlin of Carrolton, who later became governor.[5]

During 1823, Peck became much impressed with the possibilities and influence of Bible societies. The country was rapidly filling with settlers, but there was an all too evident lack of Bibles and Testaments. Fired with zeal by the Seventh Annual Report of the American Bible Society, he succeeded in establishing two societies in Greene and Madison Counties. The

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[3]Babcock, Memoir, 172; Reynolds, Friendship's Offering, Chap. 10.
[4]Babcock, Memoir, 173 et seq.
[5]Ibid., 178.

idea that work at that time might accomplish more if directed wholly toward organizing Bible societies than in missionary work, led him to seek an agency of the American Bible Society. This was readily granted and he was thus launched upon a new line of work.[6]

About this time Peck had a curious experience. A man named Green had committed murder on December 4, 1823. On January 14 he was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged on the twelfth of the following month. Green then applied to Peck to attend him at the execution, and before his arrival professed conversion. This seemed worthy of suspicion, but after careful examination thru two days Peck's distrust was removed. The prisoner, it seems, repented immediately after his deed, and he desired to be baptized by Mr. Peck. On the fifth of February, therefore, a hole was cut in the ice of a stream near the jail and the solemn ceremony was performed. The baptism of a murderer who within a week was to be hanged for his crime,was an occurrence to arouse the deepest feelings of the people. Just before the execution Peck preached a sermon to two thousand persons who had gathered. All realized the sincerity of Green, and the humble and fearless manner in which he accepted what he felt to be a just sentence moved the hearts of many that day. As a result of it all, one person professed conversion at the time and Peck's journal records others traceable to the same event.[7]

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[6]Babcock, Memoir, 185 et seq.
[7]Babcock, Memoir, 188 et seq.; Flagg Scrap-books,III. Article from Alton Telegraph, written by G. Churchill.

While founding Bible societies, Peck was inspired to introduce the Bible into public schools for regular reading as a text and was quite successful in persuading schools to take up his plan.[8] It is only a step from a Bible society to a Sunday school. Conditions in general had been against the latter in the West, but some work had been done. The first Sunday school in Illinois was organized in Alton in 1819 by the Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Lippincott, who gathered children into their home for religious instruction. Others followed their example and in 1823 Peck opened one at his home. Probably his direct contact with this one gave him an increased interest in them, and the year before the beginning of the American Sunday-school Union he was at work founding county Sunday school societies in Illinois.[9]

On his return from a missionary tour it was Peck's custom to sum up in his diary the facts of his trip much as he reported them to the missionary society. From these may be learned the vast amount of work he was doing and his intense earnestness and zeal for God's work. In those days when streams had to be crossed by fording or swimming, when the best of roads were often impassible, when a traveler might ride all day without meeting a fellow human being and then camp for the night in the woods alone, perhaps without supper, and all this in any sort of weather, travel was not by any means a pleasant undertaking. Yet for years, John M. Peck, in

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[8]Peck in American Baptist Magazine, IV
[9]Babcock, Memoir, 192; Rev. T. Lippincott,"Early Days in Madison County", in Alton Telegraph, 1864-5.

all seasons, endured these things and endless other discomforts and inconveniences like a true soldier of the Cross, and gloried in them[10]. In 1824 he wrote to the society: "My mind is often deeply impressed with the thought that I am laboring for future generations, and that the principles inculcated and the habits introduced in the Baptist Society in this country will last for ages. Under what high and weighty responsibility should every professor, and particularly every preacher, act who lays the foundation in a new country".[11]

Many have thought it remarkable that one man could accomplish all he did. Since the attack of fever at the time of his arrival in 1817 he was often dangerously ill, but he never regarded his health. Boils seemed an almost constant source of annoyance during the first years in the West and his diary frequently notes illness from some of the various fevers so common in the lowlands at that time. Only a rugged pioneer could withstand these repeated attacks and the constant hardships which he underwent; and even he, in his last years, found his health prematurely broken because of them.[12] He was a man formed by nature powerful and robust; muscular but with no leaning toward corpulency and more than six feet tall; he weighed about one hundred and eighty pounds. He seemed able to endure twice as much as the ordinary man. In the pulpit he stood erect, but in walking usually leaned forward and took long strides. Along with his strength went a masterful determination

[10]Babcock, Memoir, 202 et seq; American Baptist Magazine, n.s.IV.
[11]Morehouse, Baptist Home Missions in America, Part 3, chap. 3.
[12]Babcock, Memoir, 161, 165, 167, 216, 254, 352.

to do, to overcome, to accomplish; and so what to some would have proven impassible barriers, he was able to compass.[13]

It would seem that Peck's spiritual nature must have been unusually viril and that the petty weaknesses and temptations which shake the faith of other men were foreign to him; but not so. Often in his diary was recorded a regret over his spiritual life; often the remark that his earnestness and zeal were weak and that he longed for a greater faith in God, and greater anxiety for the good of the kingdom. Whenever any calamity occurred such as the death of his son, or sickness of himself or his wife or children, he felt that it was but a just retribution upon him for laxness in spiritual things. Thus he wrote: "My neglect of secret devotion, and failure to cultivate the humility of soul and close walk with God, which ought to be maintained under all circumstances, is probably the case of these doubts. Amidst a multiplicity of business, which though not chiefly of a worldly character, yet proves a temptation for relaxation in more spiritual and heavenly things, I find myself prone to depart from the living God". But, he continues, whenever in such trials as were referred to above, he found grace to commit himself and family wholly to the mercy of God, the hand of the Lord was turned from him and they all were blessed.[14] Such faith and reliance could not but reflect itself in his life and teachings and were chiefly responsible for the great

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[13] Reynolds, Friendship's Offering, chap. 8.
[14] Babcock, Memoir, 197.

good he accomplished.

That Peck was a leader is self-evident. His natural ability as well as his education made him so. He was never said by those men who knew him best to be a vain or egotistical man,but he no doubt realized his superiority over the many uneducated ministers who, as he very aptly put it, "Like the blind horse in the mill, go round and round on the few Scriptural ideas they possess".[15] Perhaps he did not make "sufficient allowance for life habits, or begin with sufficient caution and gentleness, for there was much simplicity of faith and childlike docility in this primitive people."[16] It would not be surprising if some of this class took offense where none was intended. They made considerable opposition to him, however, not so much on the score of education as because he received pay for his work. They believed that a minister should make a living by some sort of business and not be paid for time devoted to the kingdom of God. Peck on the other hand, felt it wrong for a man consecrated to God's service by ordination, to devote a large part of his time to secular affairs; and his own experience showed him that his usefulness was greatly lessened when he took himself for a time away from missionary and religious work. "So very clear and positive", he wrote, "are the Scriptures on ministerial support that we are convinced it would be wrong in this day of light, for ministers

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[15] Babcock, Memoir, 152

[16] Lippincott, "Early Days in Madison County," no. 44.

to baptize persons or organize professors into churches who will not acknowledge the principle and conform to the practice according to their ability."[17]

The "Hard-shell" or anti-mission spirit was growing at this time and under the leadership of two men - Daniel Parker and William Kinney - the opposition to Peck as a missionary and a preacher of missions became very intense. Peck wished to unite the western churches so that they might cooperate with the mission society of the East, but chiefly because of the efforts of these two men little was accomplished. Of the two Parker probably exerted the greater influence. He was uneducated, uncouth in appearance, slovenly in dress and diminutive in person, but his zeal and enthusiasm bordered on insanity and at times he spoke with such inspiring oratory and brilliancy of thought and force of language that men of education and talents envied him his power. Peck, however, lived to see his own principles dominate and the people of the West join heartily in the support of missions.[18]

Benjamin J. Seward represented the American Sunday-school Union in Illinois for a short time and then Peck succeeded him. On March 6, 1825 he directed the formation of the "General Sunday-school Union for Missouri and Illinois". It was undenominational and its object was to distribute Sunday-school literature and keep active the schools already in existence. By September of 1825 Peck had one hundred schools in

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[17] Western Pioneer and Baptist Standard Bearer, Aug. 5, 1836
[18] Newman, American Church History, II, 439.

operation with a total of three thousand scholars. In the same period he formed eighteen new Bible societies and revived three which had been discontinued.[19]

As tho he had not yet enough to do, he became agent for the American Tract Society in 1827 and organized the "Tract Society of Missouri and Illinois" with several branches. Arrangements were then made to put into circulation fifty-thousand pages of the tracts at cost. While conducting these various lines of activity he also found time to contribute to numerous periodicals in the East on conditions in the Mississippi Valley. By the many articles signed "J. M. Peck" he was a well known man before his first return to Philadelphia.

The varied experiences of these years in traveling throughout Illinois and becoming personally acquainted with the people and all the physical features, geography, flora and fauna of the state were later of great value to Peck and to the people at large.

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[19]Lippincott, "Early Days in Madison County", no. 45; American Baptist Magazine, V

CHAPTER IV

THE CRISIS OF 1823-1824

One of Peck's greatest claims to the gratitude of the people of Illinois and of the Union, lies in his work against the introduction of slavery into Illinois. The French in this country had held slaves since 1719 and had had their rights in that property guaranteed to them by various treaties and when that part of the country was ceded to the federal government in 1784 by Virginia[1]. Altho slavery had been forbidden by the Ordinance of 1787, many slaves came in under the territorial government with the settlers from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and Louisiana and were held under a system of indenture provided for by the territorial laws. These laws came to be evaded to such an extent that, aside from the slaves held by the French, to all intents and purposes, real slavery existed in Illinois prior to 1818.[2]

Section 1, Article VI, of the Constitution of 1818 begins thus: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall hereafter be introduced into this state, otherwise than for the punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted", and continues to express conditions whereby certain persons might be indentured for terms not to exceed one year in length.[3] Under this constitution was passed on March 30, 1819,

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[1]Harris, History of Negro Slavery in Illinois, Chap I.

[2]Ibid., 11 et seq.

[3]Thorpe, Federal and State Constitutions, II, 980.

"An Act respecting free Negroes, Mulattoes, Servants and Slaves"[4] Its provisions were so unfair to the negroes that Governor Coles, who was elected in 1822, being friendly to the negroes, recommended in his message to the legislature on December 5, 1822, first, that, whereas there was "no exception made in relation to these slaves (held by the French) in the general and explicit prohibition contained in the ordinance, (of 1787) it would seem to have been the intention of the framers of it, that slavery and involuntary servitude should cease . . . , that just and equitable provisions (should) be made for the abrogation of slavery in the state"; Second, that "justice and humanity require of us a general revisal of the laws relative to negroes, in order the better to adapt them to the character of our institutions, and the situation of our country"; and third, that "the Legislature enact more effective laws to prevent the kidnapping of free blacks - a crime which I am sorry to say is too often perpetrated with impunity in our State".[5]

To consider this matter, committees were at once appointed by each house. "The Senate committee admitted its inability to solve these problems, asserting that there was "no other source of remedying the evils mentioned by the governor than by calling a convention to alter the constitution". In the House a set of laws designed to bring about the desired result was proposed, but was tabled. Thus all attempts to carry

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[4]Laws of Illinois, 1819-1821, p.354.
[5]Edwardsville Spectator, December 14, 1822.

out Coles' recommendations failed.[6]

As succeeding action showed, a majority of each house was favorable to slavery and would have liked to see it legalized in Illinois. To do this the constitution would have to be changed. The seventh article of the constitution of 1818 provided that "whenever two-thirds of the general assembly shall think it necessary to alter or amend this constitution, they shall recommend to the electors, at the next election of members to the general assembly, to vote for or against a convention" and that if a majority of the citizens of the state voted for a convention that the legislature should call a convention.[7]

With the ostensible purpose of altering the constitution in accord with the recommendation of Coles, but in reality to legalize slavery, the proslavery men in the assembly began action to call a convention. The resolution to submit the question to the people passed the Senate by a vote of twelve to six on February 10, 1823. By proceedings which are a disgrace to the history of the state, the proslavery men in the House secured the required two-thirds and on February twelfth the bill passed, and the convention question was thus to be submitted to the people in August, 1824.[8]

The anti-slavery men immediately began their work to defeat the convention when a meeting was called in Vandalia. As soon as the news reached St. Clair County, Peck called a meeting at which "the outlines of a plan of operations was proposed,

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[6]Harris History of Negro Slavery in Illinois, 32, based on House and Senate Journals for December, 1822.
[7]Thorpe, Federal and State Constitutions, II, 980.
[8]Harris, History of Negro Slavery in Illinois, 32-39.

and a committee was appointed to draft a constitution, and call a general meeting. A much larger meeting was called in Belleville, March 22nd, 1823, a constitution adopted and the St·Clair Society for the prevention of slavery in the State of Illinois, "was duly organized". The constitution and an address to the people in which "a call was made to the opponents of the introduction of slavery in Illinois to form similar societies in other counties", were written by Peck. The county societies were asked to correspond with the society at Belleville, which assumed the leadership. John Messinger was elected President and Dr. Charles Woodworth corresponding Secretary.[9] Pursuant to the address fourteen other societies were organized and measures were taken to have workers in every precinct so that the work could be carried on methodically and the situation be well known at all times. The societies were not secret as some have maintained, but each was announced in the Edwardsville Spectator soon after its organization.[10]

Four elements carried out the work of the campaign: the societies, the newspapers, pamphlet literature, and the personal leaders. For the first of these Peck must be given the credit, as he first suggested them and saw them put into successful operation. Probably without their aid the battle would not have been won as thru them literature was circulated, the weak places were determined and strengthened and all the benefits

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[9] Peck in Free West, May 3, 1855

[10] Societies were organized as follows: Bond Co., March ?; Monroe Co., May 31; Madison, Sangamon, Edgar, Pike, Greene and Morgan Counties, July 4; Lawrence Co., Aug. 11; Piason Twp., Green Co., Sept. 7; White Co., Dec. 27.

derived which come from a minute organization to keep any question before the people. It is usually true that the side with the best machinery wins. The convention people formed societies also, the first being on December 6, 1823 at Vandalia, but tho modeled after these described, they were not so effective.[11]

Of the four newspapers in Illinois - the Edwardsville Spectator, Vandalia Intelligencer, Shawneetown Gazette and Kaskaskia Republican Advocate - the three last named were pro-convention, and a fifth, the Edwardsville Republican, was established to counteract the influence of the Spectator, which under the editorship of Hooper Warren was vigorously and fearlessly opposing the convention, tho pro-slavery the editor of the Shawneetown Gazette was fairminded enough to print the Jonathan Freeman letters written by Morris Birkbeck.[12]

The chief political leaders were conventionists. Among them were ex-Governor Bond, Jesse B. Thomas, John McLean, Elias Kane Kent, Chief Justice Phillips, William Kinney, Lieutenant Governor Hubbard and Justice John Reynolds of the Supreme Court. Opposed to them were John M. Peck, Governor Coles, Morris Birkbeck, David Blackwell, Judge Samuel D. Lockwood, Hooper Warren, Daniel P. Cook, Thomas Lippincott and George Churchill.[13]

Peck as a representative of various organizations as the mission society, Bible society, Sunday-school union, went

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[11] Washburne, Sketch of Edward Coles, 165
[12] Washburne, Sketch of Edward Coles, 167 et seq.
[13] Ibid., 169 et seq.; Harris, Negro Slavery in Illinois, 42

here and there thruout the state and very unostentatiously oversaw the whole campaign. He knew the country probably better than any other man, was well known himself and was respected everywhere. He had the address and skill to discover and embody in appropriate action all the anti-slavery elements of that region. Naturally he met some opposition. One paper, whose editor, owner and printer kept their names suppressed, made open and repeated attacks upon him and his objects.[14] With him on these trips thru the state he took a great amount of pamphlet literature against the convention and distributed it among the people. These tracts were written by such men as Peck, Jefferson,[15] Birkbeck, and Roberts Vaux. They were all able papers and exerted considerable influence.[16] The whole country was agitated over the convention question. Speeches were made; banquets were held; but as Peck said years later, the question was virtually settled before the convention people organized at Vandalia.[17]

In March, 1823, Coles informed Peck of a scheme to get control of the Vandalia Intelligencer and make it an anti-convention paper. This was kept in mind, but did not become feasible till May, 1824. The announcement that the convention

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[14] American Baptist Magazine, n.s. V, 87.

[15] Hooper Warren's "Reminiscences" in Free West, May 10, 1855. "One of these it was clear to my mind was written by Mr. Jefferson."

[16] Peck in Free West, May 3, 1855.

[17] Ibid.

party had lost its chief support was as unexpected as a thunderclap from a clear sky; but while they had grown careless, the paper become the personal property of Governor Coles. It was the last blow; they could not survive with their own guns turned upon them.[18]

The outcome on August 2, 1824, was not unexpected by either side. 4,972 votes were cast for, and 6640 against a convention, a total of 11,612. The most bitter fight which Illinois has known even to this day, was over. Practically every voter in the state had cast his ballot. In Randolph County was a religious sect calling themselves Covenanters, who had refused to do anything which might be construed as recognition of the state government because the convention of 1818 would not declare that "Jesus Christ was the head of the government and that the Holy Scriptures were the only rule of faith and practice". They took their first political action in Illinois as a state when they voted in 1824 against a convention.[19] The intense interest thruout the state is shown by the fact that in the presidential election three months later, the total vote cast was only 4490, a falling off of 7122.

The victory was great indeed. What the result would have been had the other side won and Illinois become a slave

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[18] Peck in Free West, May 3, 1855.

[19] Chamberlain, "Elias Kent Kane" in Illinois State Historical Society Transactions, 1908, p. 167.

state at that early day, can only be conjectured. Probably the whole Northwest would have followed her example and the ~~whole~~ history of the nation would have been changed. Surely the men who won this victory, and Peck as one of the chief among them, deserve first rank among the heroes of Illinois history.

CHAPTER V

ROCK SPRING THEOLOGICAL AND HIGH SCHOOL (1826-1831)

Article III of the Ordinance of 1787 begins with these words: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged". This was truly a noble sentiment but encouragement alone will not result in accomplishment. The next thirty years found a great increase in population but the schools, as has already been seen, were, in Peck's estimation, in the main public nuisances. There was no system of taxation to support schools and many of the settlers were perfectly content to allow their children to grow up without any formal education. In the more favored districts where schools were held, it was only during the winter season, when a teacher could be secured to take scholars at a fixed amount each. A certain number would be guaranteed him and in return he would usually agree to teach spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic.[1]

The enabling act for Illinois is 1818 provided "that section numbered sixteen, in every township, and when such section has been sold or otherwise disposed of, other lands equivalent thereto, and as contiguous as may be, shall be granted to the State, for the use of the inhabitants of such townships, for the use of schools"; also, that three-fifths of five per cent of the net proceeds from the sale of public lands in the State should

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[1]McMaster, History of the People of the U. S., V, 371.

be appropriated for the encouragement of learning and that one entire township should be reserved for the use of a seminary of learning under the direction of the legislature.[2] This was encouragement with a resource to support it, but for the first few years the proceeds derived therefrom were not such as to be a substantial aid. Prices were low, the sixteenth section was often a swamp or was out on the prairie, which in those days was considered the poorest land of the state, and the people themselves were not awake to the advantages of schools. So the educational system of Illinois by 1825 was not a thing of which to boast.[3]

In 1825 the legislature showed splendid spirit in passing "An Act providing for the Establishment of Free Schools". The ideas enbodied in the preamble make it worthy of citation: "To enjoy our rights and liberties we must understand them: their security and protection ought to be the first object of a free people: and it is a well established fact that no nation has ever continued long in the enjoyment of civil and political freedom, which was not both virtuous and enlightened: and believing that the advancement of literature has always been, and ever will be the means of developing more fully the rights of man, that the mind of every citizen in a republic is the common property of society, and constitutes the basis of its strength and happiness: it is therefore considered the peculiar duty of a free government like ours to encourage

[2] Thorpe, Am. Charters, Constitutions and Organic Laws, II, 969.

[3] Smith, Hist. of So. Ill., I,369.

and extend the improvement and cultivation of the intellectual energies of the whole". The law following provided for the establishment in each county, of schools for whites on petition of a majority of the voters in the district, no district to contain less than fifteen families. For their support, two dollars out of every hundred thereafter received in the treasury of the state, plus five-sixths of the interest from the school fund, should be appropriated; and further a majority of the voters in a district were to "levy a tax either in cash, or good merchantable produce, at cash price, upon the inhabitants of their respective districts, not exceeding one half per centum, nor amounting to more than ten dollars per annum, on any one person."[4] For its day this was an excellent law, but as it was not mandatory, and depended for its usefulness on the willingness of the people to tax themselves, no particular change in the situation resulted and in 1827 the law was repealed.

Ever since his arrival in the western country Peck had taken great interest in schools. While the condition of elementary schools was deplorable, he saw that there was also a very great need for a higher school and one in which special training might be given those who wished to enter the ministry. Toward the close of 1825 he saw the way opening for the inauguration of a plan which he had evolved. This plan was three fold. 1 - a circuit system of preaching was to be established in Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri, with one preacher to each circuit,

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[4] Laws of the State of Illinois, 182, p. 121 et seq.

who was to receive one hundred dollars per annum from the mission board, and collect the rest of his living from the churches he conducted; 2 - an efficient preacher was to be secured to supply the church of St. Louis, who should earn half his support by conducting a school there; 3 - a theological school was to be established in Illinois for these three states, where young men might be trained for pastorships.[5]

The very fullest support from the East would be needed for this enterprise. For eight years Peck had labored all over this field and had written voluminously to many eastern religious magazines. Feeling, however, that a personal appeal would accomplish more, on February 22, 1826, he set out across the prairies and mountains, burning with a mighty message. Great must have been his joy to visit the familiar places and greet old friends after so long an absence. In Washington he visited President Adams, (for whom he had named his eldest son), Dr. Stoughton, then President of Columbia University, Mr. Rice and others. Passing on thru Philadelphia to New York he told his message from the frontier. From April 26 to May 7 he attended the Triannial Baptist Convention in New York, and then the meetings of various benevolent organizations such as the American Tract Society, American Home Mission Society, Colonization Society, Temperance Society, and Sunday-school Union, of all of which he was a firm supporter. Not until after this did he have time to visit his old home,and his mother who had become a second time a widow since his departure nine years before.[6]

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[5]Babcock, Memoir, 220.
[6]Ibid., 212 et seq.

In a few days he set out for Boston, where he attended the anniversary of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society and there proposed his plan. The next day the plan was adopted and Peck was made agent to secure the necessary funds to put it into operation. The summer was spent in this work with highly gratifying results. He made himself familiar with the methods of the leading schools in the East in order to prepare himself for the guidance of his new school.[7] The three southern states of New England gave most freely for the proposed school and he received a total of $658.52 in cash while donations in books, jewelry, etc., amounted to $314.50, so he collected all together gifts to the amount of $973.02[8]. The prospect seemed very bright when, taking his old mother with him, he started for his home in Illinois.

On the first of January, 1827, a number of men who were interested in the school, met by Mr. Peck's request, at his home.[9] That day the name "Rock Spring Theolcgical and High School" was adopted, a site on Peck's farm was chosen and Major Peter Cownover, Rev. Gorham Holmes, Rev. Messrs. James Lemen, James Pulliam, Zadock Darrow and John M. Peck, and Messrs. John Messinger, William Engle and Theron Brownfield were elected trustees. James Lemen was made president of the board; Peck, secretary and treasurer. Peck was also made superintendent of buildings and general

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[7] Ibid., 219 et seq.

[8] Am. Bapt. Mag., VI, no. 22.

[9] A full copy of the minutes of this meeting is in the Am. Bapt. Mag., VII, no. 5.

agent. The location at Rock Spring was chosen partly because the site of twenty-five acres was donated by Peck and partly because of the "healthfulness of the situation, its proximity to St. Louis, the center of trade, business and commerce of these states, and its central position in relation to the States of Indiana, Illinois and Missouri". A resolution stated that the institution should embrace two departments: one to give instruction in biblical literature and Christian theology and the other in such scientific and literary branches as would meet the demand of persons wishing the education furnished by eastern schools.

The financial support tendered in the East, tho generous, was insufficient to launch the new enterprise in a manner satisfactory to the trustees and it was decided to appeal to the friends of education in Illinois for help. Thosewho wished to help the school were given the privilege of donating outright or of purchasing shares of stock at a par value of ten dollars each.[10] Subscribers were allowed to pay in cash, provisions, cattle, flour, labor, building materials or furniture; those in the east who had helped were voted shares for each ten dollars worth contributed; each share entitled the holder to one vote

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[10] Certificate No. 11 was sent to Rev. Daniel Sharp, Boston, and is now in possession of the New England Baptist Library. It is as follows:
No. 11. This certifies That Revd. Daniel Sharp has paid twenty dollars to the Rock Spring Theological and High School, for which he is the owner of two Shares and entitled to all the privileges in the aforesaid Institution, guaranteed by the Trustees, at a meeting held January 1st, 1827, and recorded in the Clerk's Office, St. Clair County, Illinois.
Rock Spring, St. Clair County, August 10th, 1827.
John M. Peck, Secretary. James Lemen, President.

for trustees of the school. It was expected in this way that one thousand dollars or its equivalent might be raised.

Work on the buildings was begun at once. The plans adopted showed careful consideration both for economy of means and of the needs of the school. The main building was a frame structure twenty by forty feet and two stories high with a twelve by fourteen foot wing on each side,[11] and was erected about one hundred and fifty yards from Peck's home.[12] The upper story of the central part was occupied as a lodging room for the young men, while the floor below sufficed for a public hall and general school room. The right wing was used for the library and professors' study; the left for students' reading and recitation room.[13]

To reduce the cost as much as possible Peck worked at laying the foundation and cut poles for the building's frame from his own timber on the very site of the school. The Rev. Thomas Lippincott[14] was told by Peck, that, being thus at work with his axe one day a young Presbyterian minister, John M. Ellis, a graduate of Andover Theological Seminary, who had but lately come to Illinois, rode up and asked what he was doing. Peck

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[11] Am. Bap. Mag. VII, 156.

[12] Draper Mss. 1Z 14.

[13] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 40.

[14] Lippincott, "Early Days in Madison County."

replied, "I am building a Theological Seminary". "What, in these barrens?" said Ellis. "Yes", said Mr. Peck, "I am planting the seed". During the conversation which followed he suggested that the Presbyterians in Illinois also ought to be doing something toward higher and theological education. This was planting seed truly and as Ellis rode away thinking of what Peck had said, the suggestion grew in his imagination and resulted in the founding of Illinois College at Jacksonville.

By the help of willing neighbors the frame was raised and in June the building was finished, A log cabin boarding house was built along side and the "plant" was complete. November 1, 1827 was a notable day, for it marked the opening of the first permanent school for higher education, not only in Illinois but in the whole Mississippi Valley. Others followed, one in 1828 by Bishop McKendree,only about three miles from Peck's school, and another in 1829 at Jacksonville by Ellis, as has already been shown. Thus it is seen that both of the latter were founded thru the influence of Peck.[15]

School opened with the Rev. Joshua Bradley,A. M.,as principal. He was an excellent man for the place, having worked his way thru Brown University and graduated with high honors in 1799. The remaining years of his life he devoted to founding schools and churches. At the earnest solicitation of Peck he left the school he was then conducting in Kaskaskia to accept

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[15]Smith, Hist. of So. Ill, 382.

the new position. Bradley and Professor John Russell, another man well known in early Illinois history for his educational and literary work, conducted the literary department. The theological department was in charge of Mr. Peck. Twenty boarding students and several day scholars enrolled the first week. Three weeks later Peck wrote to Mr. Sharp in Boston that the prospects from the numerous applications were that they would have an enrollment of one hundred the next year.[16] The upper room of the main building was not finished for some years but the young men occupied it as a sleeping room, using straw mattresses on the floor for beds. The girls roomed at the Peck home about one hundred fifty yards away.[17]

The financial condition was much less satisfactory than the enrollment. 320 acres of land had been purchased in the military tract[18] but it produced no income and the revenue of the school was not sufficient to pay the three salaried teachers. Mr. Peck had made the largest investment of any and soon found himself and family in want. On November 22, 1827, he wrote to Daniel Sharp that he was the professor of Christian theology with the nominal salary of two hundred dollars per annum. "But", he continued, "there is a small inconvenience about it. There is not, nor is it likely there will be, a cent of funds realized to pay my salry. I do not expect it unless I occasion-

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[16]Peck to Rev. Daniel Sharp, Boston, Nov. 22, 1827, in New England lang. Baptist Library.
[17]De Bois, The Pioneer School, 40.
[18]Ibid., 35.

ally get some articles of produce".[19] He secured agencies from the Massachusetts Missionary Society and the American Bible Society, however, and thus eked but a living for himself and family.[20] One unique thing about the school was the industrial system. Students were required to do daily some manual labor both for the sake of learning useful work and for the exercise which was considered essential to their good health. In this way they provided their own firewood, took care of the buildings and cultivated twenty acres of the twenty-five on which the school was situated, thus producing crops which helped the school.[21]

Mr. Bradley resigned at the end of the first year on account of his health. Many more years of his life were spent in educational work, however, and at his death he was state superintendent of public instruction in Minnesota.[22] He was succeeded as principal by John Messinger, well known in Illinois as the author of a surveyors manual and as one of the surveyors of the northern boundary of the state in 1833.[23] In the four years that the school continued at Rock Spring, 242 students were enrolled. This was proof of the demand and need for such an institution. Among those enrolled were the name of Elihu and John M. (later Governor) Palmer, Numian W. Edwards, Jr., William Rider and William and Penelope, children of Nathaniel Pope.[24]

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[19] See note 16.
[20] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 40, and another letter dated July 15, 1828.
[21] See note 16.
[22] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 35, 42.
[23] Buck, "The New England Element in Illinois Politics before 1893", in Miss. Valley Hist. Assoc., Proc., , VI, (1912-13).
[24] Humphrey , "Dr. John Mason Peck and Shurtleff College", in Ill. State Hist. Soc. Trans., 1907, p. 152; De Blois, The Pioneer School, 29.

Seeking to fill a great want and perhaps to gain some financial profit to better provide for his family, Peck with the aid of a printer, Rev. I. P. Green, issued on April 25, 1829, the first religious paper in Illinois if not in the whole region west of the Alleghanies. It was a five column folio called "The Pioneer of the Valley of the Mississippi. Half of the funds for its extablishment were supplied by Green and the remainder by friends in the East who stipulated that their share of the profits should be turned over to the seminary. There were no profits however and the balancing of the books usually showed a loss which editor Peck felt bound to make up himself as he was constantly sending the paper to many persons whom he felt needed its religious influence.[25]

His years in Illinois had now shown the Pioneer what enormous possibilities the new state possessed; he saw that it was being rapidly filled with settlers and that its future depended largely on the class of settlers who came first. He had written article after article to periodicals all over the East, and was receiving a great many inquiries about the western states. Thinking to attract a good class of people and furnish the information sought by so many, he began work in the winter of 1831 on a Guide to Emigrants. The course of his various labors had made him probably more familiar with Illinois than any other person in it and fitted him eminently for the writing of such a book. Peck finished writing it but his multifarious labors had

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[25]De Blois, The Pioneer School, 38.

broken his health and it was copied and prepared for the press by a young man named Alvan Stone, whom Peck had persuaded to come to Illinois a short time before.[26] The book was published in 1831 and contains many facts of western history, geographical data and in fact everything which a prospective emigrant could desire to know. It met with splendid success and revised and enlarged editions were published in 1836 and in 1837.[27]

Being the main support of the seminary, Peck realized in the summer of 1831 that his health made it impossible for him to reopen the school in the fall. For four years of forty-four weeks it had continued. By this time it was seen that the location on the stage route from Vincennes to St. Louis lacked advantages offered by a small city. Until proper financial support could be secured and a better location found, the trustees decided to close the school indefinitely in May 1831.[28]

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[26] Memoir of Alvan Stone, 165.
[27] Lippincott, "Early Days in Madison County", no. 46.
[28] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 42 et seq.

CHAPTER VI

VARIED LABORS (1831-1835)

The next ten years of Peck's life were filled in large part with a continuation of his benevolent work similar to that already described; a further account of his religious activities would result in a monotonous relation of attendance at associations, anniversaries, conventions, of missionary trips, and organization of churches and societies in almost endless amount. While he might have turned his talents to more remunerative pursuits, he loved this work in spite of its hardships. Various events occurred which broke the monotony of his life; events which were important not only in his own life but in history.[1]

His continuous writing for the various eastern periodicals at length had the effect of arousing the Baptists there to the need and desirability of conducting organized missions in the West. As a result Dr. Jonathan Going of Worcester, Massachusetts, was sent to visit Peck in the field. He reached Rock Spring on June 20, 1831. The next three months he and Peck spent together in exploring the field and planning future work. After traveling over a large part of Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky, they parted at Shelbyville, in the latter state, in September.[2] A brief note in Peck's diary on the day before their separation tells a great story. The words are these: "Here we

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[1] Babcock, Memoir, 249 et seq.

[2] Ibid., 243.

agreed on the plan of the American Baptist Home Mission Society". The plan which Peck thru his persistance and earnestness convinced the Baptists of America was both feasible and practical, was adopted by the Triennial Convention in 1832. Since then the organization has expanded and increased its usefulness in many ways wholly unthought of by its author but to him is largely due the credit for the later good which it has accomplished.[3]

The Indian troubles of 1831-1832 including the Black Hawk War, made themselves felt even in Mr. Peck's occupation. He had come to St. Louis some thirteen years before to bear to these ignorant savages a message concerning the white man's God,- the God of peace and love. While as has already been shown, circumstances kept him from ever devoting his time exclusively to the Indians, yet the longing for their salvation remained with him and it saddened his heart to see them shot down in battle without a knowledge of the teachings of Christ. His religious appointments, too, were often broken up by the military fervor which possessed the people, and the brutalized temper shown by some of his friends when actuated by the war spirit made him sick at heart.[4]

There were in Illinois at this time many Baptists who would not subscribe for a religious paper costing as much as one dollar, Peck felt that they were the class who needed such literature most, so in addition to his other paper, he began in September, 1830. a monthly called The Western Baptist. He

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[3]Morehouse, Baptist Home Missions in America, part 3, chap. 3.

[4]Babcock, Memoir, 246 et seq.

believed that if these people would only begin to take a denominational paper, tho a small one, that they could soon be induced to subscribe for a larger one, altho it cost more. The production of such a publication was made possible at this time by the coming of a printer - Ashford Smith. It was brought out for about a year and was devoted chiefly to counteracting the antinomianism of Daniel Parker and the new ideals of Alexander Campbell. In 1832 the two papers were merged into one, and issued on a "medium-sheet", semimonthly, under the name of The Pioneer and Western Baptist.[5]

For some years the Baptists of the state had had what was dignified by the name of the "Union Meeting". It was not an organization but simply an annual meeting where sermons were preached and matters of doctrine discussed. Peck had attended state meetings in the East and the Western Baptist Convention at Cincinnati, and felt that the Baptists of Illinois ought to be organized also. "In 1833 at the "Union Meeting', preliminary measures were adopted to constitute a convention and which was consumated in 1834, with the name of the 'Baptist Convention of Illinois'". Its object was to collect and publish statistics of the denomination, to aid in supplying the gospel to destitute neighborhoods, to promote education and extend union and harmony among the Baptists of Illinois.[6]

About this time Peck was called to preach the funeral sermons for two of his oldest and dearest friends in the West - ex-Governor Ninian Edwards and Father John Clark. The

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[5]Peck in Baptist Memorial, I, 204 et seq., (1842)

[6]Ibid.

discourse over Edwards was preached at Belleville on December 22, 1833, and is one of the clearest sources for what might be called Peck's political philosophy. He chose as a text, the words from Ezekial 19:13, "Her strong rods were broken and withered". Edward's strong, upright character and the traits which made him a respected man in Illinois politics were set forth. The definition of a patriot, as he gave it that day is interesting. "A patriot is one who is actuated by love of his country and who will sacrifice his own interests rather than the interests of the people. Private interests are merged in public good". He closed with the words: "Filled and overwhelmed with a sense of this weighty responsibility [to country "for none of us liveth to himself"] let each one act well his part in life that blessings may water his memory when his ashes have comingled with their kindred dust."[7]

The winter and spring of 1834 found Peck at work upon a book which he called "A Gazetteer of Illinois". As he stated in the preface it was written at the suggestion and request of many of his fellow citizens. The book is divided into three parts containing (1) a general view of the State, (2) a general view of each county and (3) a particular description of each town, settlement, stream, prairie, bottom, bluff, etc., alphabetically arranged". Beside this, it contains an immense amount of information concerning climate, flora and fauna, crops, game, minerals,

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[7]Edwards, History of Illinois, 252.

natural curiosities and features and other things. The first edition of forty-two hundred copies was printed by Robert Coudy of Jacksonville and was the first book, other than law and legislative reports, printed in Illinois. The "boards" were procured from Cincinnati,[8] and the Illinois Advocate of December 3, 1834, pronounced the typographical execution superior to that in any work previously printed in the state. After commenting favorably on the work, the Advocate expressed as its only regret that the work was not accompanied by a good map of Illinois.

During all of these years Peck had been devoting part of his time to the school which had been reopened at Upper Alton. In November while attending the convention of western Baptists in Cincinnati, the Western Baptist Educational Society was formed. Its object, as stated in the constitution adopted some time later, was "the education of those who give evidence to the churches in which they are members, that God designs them for the ministry".[9] The school at Upper Alton was naturally discussed in this connection and Peck was advised to visit Massachusetts in an endeavor to raise funds for it. In the winter of 1834 he decided to move to Alton so as to be near the college, and purchased lots on which to build his home but for some reason never explainedm he remained at Rock Spring. Following up the suggestion of the educational society the college trustees sent Peck on a tour of the eastern states to raise twenty

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[8] Ill. State Hist. Soc., Trans., 1907, p. 316.

[9] Baptist Advocate, I (Nov. 1835)

thousand dollars. He set out on April 11, 1835, and on the twenty-fifth reached Richmond, Virginia, in time to attend the Triennial Convention then in session.[10] There he met Dr. Cox and Mr. Hoby, representatives of the Baptist Union of England and accompanied them to New York. His acquaintance with them resulted in deep esteem and when the abolitionists some time afterward attacked the two Englishmen as being friendly to slavery, Peck took occasion to defend them and show their real attitude as being opposed to that institution.[11]

On October 24, the return journey from New York was begun. Just six months had elapsed since his arrival at Richmond and in that time, besides the Triennial Convention, he had attended the New York Baptist Anniversaries, a meeting of the Anti-Slavery society, the anniversaries of the American Tract, Bible and Colonization societies, a meeting of the American Sunday school Union in Philadelphia and scores of Baptist associations in New England and New York; he had preached frequently and visited Newton Seminary and Brown University. In the tour he traveled 5860 miles and attained his object; yet there was no exultation when he attended the Western Baptist Convention on his return, but only a humble gratitude to the kind Providence which had blessed his mission. To attend great meetings where noble and learned and good men were met and listened to, was his delight and always filled him with new zeal and earnest-

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[10]Babcock, Memoir, 257, et seq.

[11]Babcock, Memoir, 266.

ness for his chosen work.[12]

Peck's activity in meetings with which he was connected is well shown by the minutes of the Western Baptist Convention, and of the Western Baptist Educational Society in 1834 and 1835. No other name appears so often as his. In committees, in discussion of questions, leading in prayer, preaching to a meeting, or in giving reports on matters assigned to his charge he was ever at the front.

It has been maintained that Peck realized his superior education and abilities to such an extent that he felt contempt for fellow-ministers who were less fortunate or less blessed in that regard.[13] Such statements are wholly groundless. It is true that he realized fully the superior ability of an educated ministry in carrying on religious work, but he appreciated also the good done by that large class of men who, tho unlearned, were using what talents they possessed for good. To show his charitable attitude toward these men it is only necessary to give a resolution which Peck proposed and had adopted at the Western Baptist Educational Society meeting on November 7, 1835: "Resolved, that while we urge forward the great work of educating our young brethern, we regard with fraternal affection and confidence our fathers and brethern in the ministry in the west, who in early life, never had the advantages of a regular education, and yet have been pioneers in preaching the gospel to the destitute, and forming churches and associations in our early settlements, and whose piety, and devotedness, and sacrifices against embarrass-

[12] See minutes in Baptist Advocate, I, II.
[13] Lippincott, "Early Days in Madison County", no. 43.

ments and difficulties deserve high commendation, and whose success in the ministry is a matter of devout gratitude to God".[14]

[14] Baptist Advocate, II, (Nov. 1835)

CHAPTER VII

SHURTLEFF COLLEGE

When Dr. Going arrived at Rock Spring in 1831 he was informed of Mr. Peck's intention to close the school until it could be reopened at a better location and under a more efficient management. On reviewing the situation Dr. Going agreed that the change was necessary and as he and Peck traveled that summer they were on the lookout for a place which fitted the requirements of the school. Dr. Benjamin F. Edwards was most favorably inclined to the growing town of Edwardsville in which he lived, but the other two men thought Upper Alton a more advantageous location. Dr. Edwards acceeded to their wishes and in July the three selected the site and made arrangements to purchase one hundred and twenty two acres of land there.[1]

Rock Spring had proven to be too far from the routes of trade. Upper Alton however, had the advantage of being in a community which was growing very rapidly and Alton proper was then thought to be the future metropolis of the West; it was on the Mississippi opposite the mouth of the Missouri and only some fifteen or twenty miles from the mouth of the Illinois. The site chosen was on the bluff back from the river, where good water was abundant. A more healthful location, or one better situated from the viewpoint of attracting students could not then have been found in Illinois.[2]

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[1] Draper Mss., 1Z 20; De Blois, The Pioneer School, 49 et seq.

[2] Peck to Mass. Bapt. Miss. Soc., Dec. 23, 1831, in New England Baptist Library. "We expect that Alton will yet be the Boston of Illinois. It now bids fair to rise to eminence, having more general and local advantages for a river port than any other place in the State."

It has sometimes been said that the credit for the school which was established at Upper Alton was not due to Mr. Peck but to Hubbel Loomis[3], and that it was a new school dating from its formal opening in 1832 and not a continuation of the Rock Spring Seminary. How these errors have arisen it is difficult to understand but the truth is easily set forth.

As before stated, the site in Upper Alton was chosen in July, 1831. At that time Hubbel Loomis was conducting a private school in Kaskaskia. He was the best educated man in the State, with long experience as a teacher. The last two days of February, 1832, Peck spent in traveling the fifty four miles from Rock Spring to Kaskaskia, for the purpose of inducing Loomis to close his school thre and open one in Upper Alton and thus keep the educational idea before the people while a building for the new schocl was being erected. Then when Peck's school was opened, Loomis was to become its principal. Mr. Loomis agreed to these plans and moved to Upper Alton in April; but not being satisfied with the prospects there, he opened a private school at Edwardsville. The first meeting in which Loomis took any definite action in regard to Peck's school was on June 4, 1832. At that time the plans were practically completed.[4] So with all due regard for the great work which Mr. Loomis did for the college in later years, the truth is that he had nothing whatever to do with founding it.

In regard to the second point of controversy the evi-

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[3] Christian Times, Feb. 2, 1854.

[4] Peck in Alton Weekly Courier, July 13, 1854; De Blois, The Pioneer School, 50, et seq.

dence is equally plain. July 20, 1831, the trustees of Rock Spring Seminary met and "Resolved, That the Trustees will hold themselves ready to receive proposals from any quarter in this state, and consider the propriety and expediency of a change of location."[5] A committee of three was appointed on July 26 to consider the proposals from different places. They accepted the site already chosen by Edwards, Going, and Peck. These are simply matters of record in the minutes of the meetings of the trustees. In his Guide to Emigrants, published in 1831, Peck wrote in regard to the school: "Owing to the failure of the health of the late principal it is suspended for the present season; but its friends are about to adopt measure to revive it and raise it to a higher rank as a literary institution". Dr. Edwards once made the statement that "Rock Spring Seminary was removed to Upper Alton and there continued as Alton Seminary".[6] These two matters have been dwelt upon at length to prove conclusively that John M. Peck was the founder of Shurtleff College, the school whose origin antedates that of any other school for higher education in the Mississippi Valley which has lived to the present day.

After the site at Upper Alton was decided upon, nothing further was done until the next summer when seven men - Benjamin D. Edwards, Hubbel Loomis, Enoch Long, William Manning, Stephen Griggs, George Smith and Cyrus Edwards - entered into

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[5]Peck in Alton Courier, July 13, 1854.

[6]De Blois, The Pioneer School, 44.

a written agreement to advance $125 each and be jointly obligated for a loan of eight hundred more. The 122 acres already referred to were purchased for four hundred dollars, and 240 acres adjoining this were entered at the government land office at the regular price of one dollar and a quarter per acre. Dr. Going had given assurance that considerable aid would be furnished by eastern brethern when those around Alton showed their willingness to give material support. Relying on this, the self-constituted board of trustees, to whom had been added others by the Union Meeting of Baptists in Illinois and the Northern Baptist Education Society of Boston, adopted plans to begin a two story brick building, forty by thirty two feet, with a stone basement.[7] Without waiting for its completion, Mr. Loomis took his position as principal, and, at the suggestion of Peck, opened the new school in the town hall in September, 1832. The library of about fifteen hundred volumes, and the furniture and bedding of Rock Spring Seminary were removed to Upper Alton. Under the name of the"Library and Theological Seminary of Alton" the school reopened with an enrollment of about thirty five. People were becoming interested in education and the outlook was bright.[8]

When the board met some time later, however, the building committee had done nothing. It was then decided that the building must be finished by the following June (1833). Each trustee pledged himself to pay an equal share of the cost as a

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[7]De Blois, The Pioneer School, 52, 310.

[8]Ibid., 53.

loan and as fast as money came in by subscription this was to be paid back. Work was then begun. Realizing the need of support from the more firmly established part of the denomination in the eastern states, the trustees decided early in 1833, to send Mr. Loomis to them as a special agent of the "College" as it was already being called. He was promised four hundred dollars per year and his traveling expenses, and was authorized, should his success warrant it, to engage one or two additional teachers. In the latter part of May the seminary was closed because of an epidemic of the cholera and Mr. Loomis set our on his mission in June.[9]

At the fall opening, John Russell, who had been a teacher at Rock Spring, was made principal in the absence of Mr. Loomis. Russell was a scholarly man, with several years of successful teaching experience, and a man who, because of his genial and impulsive nature, was more beloved by his pupils than the stern, precise Mr. Loomis. Under Russell's principalship the newly completed building was occupied. "Academic Hall", as it was called, was arranged on the first floor for a library and reading room, and a recitation room or chapel; onthe second floor were the rooms in which the young men lived. The building, with additions made upon it later, still stands, after more than eighty years, a well preserved monument to the pioneers of higher education in Illinois.[10]

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[9] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 55.

[10] Ibid., 56, 58.

Before this however, occurred an event which deserves notice. In 1828-1829 Peck had spent some time in Vandalia seeking to secure a charter for Rock Spring Seminary. He knew most of the members of the legislature personally and was highly respected by them, but, while the act of incorporation passed the lower house, it failed of passage in the Senate thru the influence of his old enemies, the anti-mission Baptists. In 1832 he again sought a charter, now for Alton College, and while it was granted by the Senate, the lower house on February 22, 1883, materially modified it by an amendment which forbade the employment of any professor of theology as a teacher in the college, or the establishment of a theological department in connection with the school. It was the first charter granted to a school west of Indiana, but because of its prohibiting clauses it was rejected by the trustees.[11]

Mr. Loomis returned in December of 1883, having raised only $490 more than his salary and expenses. Small as the amount was it came at a very acceptable time and was applied to a note about to fall due. He again resumed charge of the school and continued with it until his resignation in June, 1836. To him - aside from Peck, the most far-sighted man connected with the institution - and his persevering labor as principal was largely due the continuance of the school during the two years after his return. He had urged the trustees, tho in vain, to purchase much more land. The wisdom of this policy is evident from

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[11]De Blois, The Pioneer School, 57.

the fact that by December 1, 1835, about thirty five dollars had been realized from the sale of land which originally cost but seven hundred.[12]

Disappointed but not discouraged by his failure to secure a favorable charter, Peck renewed the effort in the winter of 1834-1835. After individual attempts had failed, the four colleges - Alton, McKendree, Illinois and Jonesboro - succeeded in having introduced an omnibus bill by which all four might be incorporated under a single act to take effect February 19, 1835. This bill passed both houses and on February 9, 1835, the Council of Revision reported its approval.[13] Section seven, after dealing with the powers and rights of the trustees, closes with these words: "Provided, however, that nothing herein contained shall authorize the establishment of a theological department in either of said colleges".[14] This clause was very unsatisfactory to all interested, especially as the theological department was looked upon as a very essential part of the school. The charter was accepted, however, with the feeling that half a loaf is better than none. The theological department was not abandoned but was operated, uncharted, under the name of the "Alton Theological Seminary", and the same men were president and trustees of each school.[15]

As Peck explained in the Alton Courier of July 13, 1854, he thought it best that he be not a member of the board in 1832.

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[12] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 57.
[13] Laws of State of Ill. 1834-1835, p. 177, et Seq.
[14] Illinois State Historical Society, Transactions, VIII, 349. (1907)
[15] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 66.

He still kept on his work of assisting the school however, and in January, 1835, proposed to the trustees that they proceed at once to raise twenty-five thousand dollars; ten thousand of it for buildings, seventy five hundred or its income for salaries of teachers, and an equal sum or its income, for the support of beneficiary theological students; that twenty thousand of this be raised in the East and the remainder in the vicinity of Alton. The suggestion met with approval; Peck was chosen eastern and Joel Sweet western agent.[16]

In April, 1835, Peck gave up his position as general superintendent of Sunday schools in Illinois and Missouri, and started on his mission. The journey has already been described, but the important part - his collecting for the college - was purposely postponed. One hundred dollars was raised in Pennsylvania and three hundred in New York; then he went to the more generous and liberal states of New England and from there forwarded drafts for various amounts up to a thousand dollars, to Dr. George Haskell, the treasurer of the college.[17] Several subscriptions were in the form of pledges. The crowning of his efforts came on October 6, when Dr. Benjamin Shurtleff of Boston,

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[16] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 66.

[17] According to a footnote in Edition of Whittier's poems, p. , Dr. George Haskell was the "schoolmaster" in "Snowbound". He came to Illinois and practiced some years and then returned to New Jersey where he established an industrial school and model community. It is also stated in this footnote that he was active in founding Shurtleff College. This latter seems erroneous as his only connection was as treasurer. (See DeBlois, The Pioneer School, p.67) He lived at Edwardsville and was Peck's physician (See Peck to Mass. Bapt. Miss. Soc., December 15, 1831 in New England Baptist Library.)

gave ten thousand dollars on condition that the school bear his name. Such a gift in those days would have been highly appreciated by the large and well established eastern institutions and it meant much more to the feeble, struggling school on the banks of the Mississippi. At length the amount determined upon was raised and Peck returned to Illinois. The future of the school was assured, and as usual the old pioneer had brought it about.[18]

During his absence Peck was made a member of the board of trustees, a position which he held until his death. Finding on his return that nothing had been done toward a new building during his absence, he took up temporary residence at Upper Alton and drew plans for buildings, estimated student expenses, arranged courses of study, and in general directed the affairs of the school.[19] In January, 1836, the legislature changed the name of Alton College to Shurtleff College which name it has borne ever since.[20] In the minutes of the Convention of Western Baptists for 1835 was a notice that the school was to have a course of study as thoro and extended as any in the United States; board was to be supplied at the rate of one dollar and a quarter per week and room rent, fuel and incidental expense were estimated at six dollars per annum.[21]

Shurtleff College has seen many years of trials and stress, but it has fitted for private and public life many of the

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[18] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 67, et seq.
[19] De Blois, The Pioneer School, 73.
[20] Ibid., 76.
[21] Triennial Baptist Register, No. 2, (1836)

best citizens of Illinois. As the oldest school in the Mississippi Valley it has deserved the name of "The Pioneer School", and has been largely instrumental in awakening the people of the central and southern parts of the state to the need and benefit of higher education. Back of whatever good the school has done, stands the personality of John Mason Peck, who thru great self-sacrifice guided the institution thru its dark days and assured its success.

CHAPTER VIII

VARIED LABORS (1836-1839)

The number of enterprises upon which Mr. Peck was usually engaged at one time would seem to assure the failure of them all; that the reverse was so generally true indicates a capacity and generalship which was remarkable. Almost immediately on his return from New England in 1835 he undertook various lines of work in addition to the college work previously mentioned and the religious and benevolent labors which ever occupied his thought and time. One of these was the revision of his Guide for Emigrants. The 1831 edition had long been sold out and as there was still a demand for it he spent much time at Vandalia in the winter and spring of 1836 preparing what was soon published under the name, A New Guide for Emigrants.[1] Beside being a revision of the former edition, it contained additional matter on Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Arkansas, the territory of Wisconsin and the adjacent parts. The edition was soon exhausted and in August of the same year he again revised it, by correcting typographical and verbal errors, and the second edition appeared January 1, 1837.[2] A third edition appeared in 1848 and Sabin in his Dictionary of Books Relating to America mentions an edition of 1844.[3]

Contemporaneously with the first edition of the New

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[1] q.v. in bibliography; Babcock, Memoir, 268.
[2] Babcock, Memoir, 270; Peck, New Guide for Emigrants, second edition, p. XIII.
[3] Buck, Travel and Description, 1765-1865, 114.

Guide Peck prepared with John Messinger a large map of Illinois.[4] This filled a very evident need and being produced by two men whose qualifications for such a task were unquestioned, met with great favor among the people. It, too, was revised and a second edition published in 1837, this time with the name A New Sectional Map of Illinois.[5] An edition appeared in 1839 and another in 1840.[6]

The disadvantages of conducting a seminary at Rock Spring proved also unfavorable to the newspaper. It was not until 1836, however, that Peck was in a position to move the paper. That Alton was the location chosen is not surprising and there on June 30, 1836, appeared the first number after the removal. The name was changed to The Western Pioneer and Baptist Standard Bearer and its scope was broadened. The Pioneer and Western Baptist had dealt almost exclusively with religious, benevolent,and social matters, but the new series contained much general news, discussed political questions and had a "Farmers' Department". By November 1, it had a circulation of about five hundred copies per week.[8]

Thru the columns of this paper knowledge is gained of another project to which part of Peck's time was devoted. This was a "General History of the Baptists throughout the West", for which he had for some time been collecting materials. He here

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[4]Babcock, Memoir, 268.
[5]Ibid., 269; Peck, Gazetteer of Illinois, p. IX.
[6]Buck, Travel and Description, 1765-1865, 151.
[7]See bibliography for files of the paper.
[8]Alton Observer, III, No. 41, (Nov. 3, 1836)

expressed a doubt that he would ever do more than gather the material for some one else to use in writing such a work.[9] It was finally published by him in serial form thru the columns of the Quarterly Register of the American Educational Society.[10]

In August, 1836, Peck with unmixed delight, saw action taken by the Baptists of Illinois along a line which he had been advocating for several years. This was the formation of the Illinois Baptist Educational Society, by the Baptist State Convention in session at Springfield, the purpose of which was to aid young men to prepare for the ministry.[11] Peck was made the first president of the society,[12] and lived to see it give substantial aid to many needy young men. It is another institution in whose organization, he was largely instrumental which exists and is actively at work.[13]

Extensive as his many literary efforts were, Peck yet found time to write to various eastern periodicals. The most important work along this line in 1836 was a series of very carefully written articles for the Baptist Advocate on "Constitutional Government and Discipline of Christian churches."[14]

The repeated contributions to papers all over the country brought him some fame as an historian, with the result that he was called upon early in 1837 to deliver at Vandalia

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[9] Western Pioneer and Baptist Standard Bearer, Nov. 4, 1836
[10] American Quarterly Register, XIV, 42-58; XV, 173-186.
[11] Western Pioneer and Baptist Standard Bearer, Sept. 2, 1836; Babcock, Memoir, 270.
[12] Preamble, Constitution, etc., in Ill. Bapt. Hist.Col., Alton, Ill.
[13] The Society meets annually at Alton on the First Tuesday of June.
[14] Baptist Advocate, II, (1836).

while the legislature was in session some lectures on early Illinois history. One was given on February 2 and dealt with the French in Illinois from 1673 to 1687; another, two evenings later, treated of the early Indian history of Illinois. A third lecture of this series, on the conquest of Illinois by George Rogers Clark was not given till two years later. Large audiences assembled in the statehouse each evening, and after the second lecture Peck was requested by a public meeting, to write and publish a "Complete History of Illinois".[15] For some time he considered the matter and even gathered materials, but eventually they were incorporated in other works or destroyed in a fire at his home.

The long missionary tours undertaken so constantly during the first fifteen years of Peck's life in the West, often subjecting him to the severest kinds of exposure, had undermined his powerful constitution and made him quite susceptible to sickness. His diary frequently notes that he had been seriously ill for ten days or two weeks.[16] Frequent prostrations in the late fall of 1836 induced him to lighten his work by selling his share of a book store in Alton which was owned jointly by him and his son, Hervey Jenks.[17]

The original forty-two hundred copies of the Gazeteer of Illinois having been sold, Peck decided to publish another edition. Much of the spring of 1837 was spent at Vandalia,

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[15] Babcock, Memoir, 271
[16] Ibid., 213, 219, 242, 254, 285, 287, et al.
[17] Western Pioneer and Baptist Standard Bearer, Nov. 4, 1836.

gathering information from the legislators who had come from every part of the state. It was a time of very rapid settlement, ten new counties having been formed since the first edition of the book appeared. This edition was made on the same plan as the former, except that the Appendix on Wisconsin Territory was omitted, Wisconsin having become a state.[18] In 1839 Peck brot out a new work called the Traveller's Directory for Illinois. It was practically a new edition of the Gazeteer and was intended as a companion to the new sectional map of Illinois referred to above.[19]

The hard times of 1837 bore heavily upon Mr. Peck. For several days he worked at the rye and hay harvest on his farm because he had not the means of hiring other help. He was not able to collect from the subscribers to the Pioneer more than half its expenses. In despair, after various plans of relief had failed, he prepared for an indefinite suspension in July. At the last moment, however, other plans for saving the paper were proposed and he staggered on under the heavy load until times improved.[20]

About the first of January, 1837, Peck began the publication of another paper called the Sunday School Banner. Very little can be learned about it except that it was a small monthly quarto, devoted to the purposes of the Illinois Sunday School Union. It continued for two years, but probably was not a financial success.[21]

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[18] Peck, Gazetteer of Illinois, Second edition, p. IX.
[19] Buck, Travel and Description, 1765-1865, 152.
[20] Babcock, Memoir, 272.
[21] American Quarterly Register, XIV, 57

The fall of 1837 was spent very largely in traveling thru central and western Illinois as agent for the Illinois state convention and as supervisor of missionaries for the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The meager remuneration received from this work came at a very opportune time. During the early part of 1838 he was pastor for one-fourth time at Rock Spring and Zoar, later in the year giving them one-half of his time.[22] This pastorship provided some financial relief for his family. The Pioneer, however, was proving itself a millstone around his neck, and in the summer of 1838 he again entertained ideas of suspension. When the Illinois Baptist convention met in September, a proposition was made for raising a fund to purchase the paper; Peck was to be retained as editor. Besides his time and labor, he had sunk upwards of four thousand dollars cash in it to keep it running and he knew that the convention would likewise find it a financial failure, so he advised against the plan. Mr. John L. Waller, editor of the Louisville (Ky.) Baptist Banner had already proposed a union of Peck's paper with his, and this Peck told the Baptists of the state was the best plan. They agreed with him and in January, 1839, the transfer was made.[23] In a similar way the Nashville Baptist, edited by Rev. R. B. C. Howell was moved to Louisville. The new paper bore the name The Baptist Banner and Pioneer. The subscription lists of the three were combined and Peck and Howell

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[22]Babcock, Memoir, 277.
[23]Ibid., 278 et seq.

became assistant editors of the Banner as the paper was commonly called.[24]

How intensely busy Peck was and what he was able to accomplish is well illustrated by the record in his diary that in the first two months of 1839 he wrote 225 letters, in addition to moving the paper, preaching and traveling. Babcock, who published his Memoirs, states that he also made copies of many of these, and that many extended to a dozen foolscap pages.[25]

While attending a meeting at Lexington, Kentucky, in April, the pastor of the Baptist church there died. Peck's address at the meeting so impressed the people that he was invited to become the new pastor. It was a great temptation for it would mean a good salary, plenty of time for writing and an end to wearisome missionary travels. He remembered the greater destitution of the Illinois field, however, and declined the splendid position.[26]

In the fall he and his wife made a two months' tour to Michigan to visit her relatives. They reached home, on their return, late in October. On the thirty-first he recorded in his diary, "This day I am fifty years old - turned half a century. When I look back, how short and frail a thing is life". Late in the year, feeling that his health did not permit of his continuing the work of superintending missionaries thru the winter, he

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[24]Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, VI.
[25]Babcock, Memoir, 282.
[26]Ibid., 284

made a final report and gave up the work. In its place he accepted at Belleville, the pastorship which the people for some time had urged upon him. This with the pastorship at Rock Spring and Zoar gave him regular preaching each Sabbath.[27]

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27 Babcock, Memoir, 287-8.

CHAPTER IX

THE BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETIES (1840-1846)

Mr. Peck attended the Western Baptist Convention in Louisville in June, 1840, as a delegate from Illinois. Its organization was unsatisfactory and he was made chairman of a committee to plan a more efficient system. After much consideration a new constitution was prepared and referred to the various western State Conventions for their opinions. Their approval was unanimous and it was adopted the next year. Following this work he devoted considerable time, at the solicitation of the Convention, to the revision of Dupuy's Social Hymn Book, which was used very largely in the West and South. Some time before this the Western Baptist Historical Society had made him its secretary and while at Louisville he secured for the organization a valuable collection of papers, minutes, manuscripts and other materials.[1]

The late summer and fall were spent in taking the census of St. Clair County. This may seem a strange work for a minister but the money received from it enabled him to pay a liberal sum which he had pledged to the college when strenuous efforts were being made to liquidate its debts. In May, 1841, he was able to sell, tho at a sacrifice, the lots which he owned in Upper Alton. In this way he secured money to pay certain debts contracted in the newspaper business which had for some time been a source of great embarrassment.[2]

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[1] Babcock, Memoir, 291.
[2] Ibid., 293, 295.

It was just at this time that Peck made his first and only venture in the field of dramatic writing. The students of the College wished to present a play at the annual college Exhibition and he prepared for them a drama entitled "Tecumthe", based on the life of the famous Indian chief Tecumseh, whom Peck had seen in his early years in Illinois. Tho it was by no means a masterpiece, its presentation in July of that year was very pleasing to those who heard it, and brought surprise to many at the versatility of the pen of their old friend and neighbor.[3]

During the convention of western Baptists at Louisville in the summer a great effort was made to separate the eastern and western Baptists. Peck, however, was one who strove to keep the connection intact and largely as a result of his endeavors the "Western Baptist Publication and Sunday school Society" was formed in close union with that at Philadelphia. Rufus Babcock, who had access to his diaries, says they show that Peck carried this thru, not because he thought it the wisest course but because it was the only way to prevent the threatened break. As a natural consequence of his activities in this connection he was at once tendered the general agency of the society by its board. He felt that his place was with the college and the churches and educational societies which had so long been under his supervision, but under the circumstances he could hardly refuse an office with the organization whose founding he had fostered, and after about three months consideration, he accepted it on September 24, 1841.[4]

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[3] Babcock, Memoir, 297.

[4] Ibid., 295, 297.

He fully realized the magnitude of his work and accepted with the statement that he would spend the winters in the South and the summers in the North, thus preserving his enfeebled health. The winter of 1841-1842 was therefore occupied by a trip down the Mississippi, on which he preached very often and scattered the literature of the society which he represented. On this trip he had his first experience at seeing a slave sold. Near the end of March he reached home again. After a short rest there he set out for the East to engender in the people there a warmer spirit of cooperation with those in the West. The seven months occupied by this trip proved highly successful; he preached in many of the cities between Richmond and Boston and succeeded in making the Baptists of that section of the county realize that the work of the Western Baptist Publication Society was their work also and one which they should help support.[5]

Some of the board of the society censured him severely for making this trip instead of using that time in laboring in the West. Peck's first notice of this opposition came thru the reading of an editorial in the Banner and Pioneer, of which he was associate editor. When the full board met in October they gave his course hearty approval, however, realizing that it had been dictated by a farsighted policy.[6]

Busy as he was on this tour, he yet found time to contribute frequently to the paper at Louisville, and to the Bap-

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[5]Babcock, Memoir, 300-308; Brown, Hist. Am. Bap. Pub. Soc.,130.

[6]Babcock, Memoir, 310.

tist Memorial he sent many articles on the history of the Baptists in Illinois and Kentucky and a"Sketch of the late Hon. and Rev. Jesse L. Holman". In July, 1842, he was made one of the editors of the Memorial. In the fall he begun writing historical articles on Daniel Boone and other subjects for the American Pioneer of Cincinnati.[7]

While in the East he had been urged to accept the vacant secretaryship of the American Baptist Publication Society but refused. During the winter, however, while he was carrying on the work of the Western society, he kept this in mind and when he received word on February 27, 1843, that he had been elected to the position he accepted.[8] Some time before this several of the board had written him on the matter and he had then said that he would accept on condition that the society be so reorganized as to inspire confidences in its supporters, that the salaries of all officials, beginning with his own, be reduced twenty per cent, that the secretary spend two thirds to three fourths of his time in agency work and that he be allowed to visit his family at Rock Spring once each year. With this understanding they had tendered him the place.[9]

He set out for his new post on April 6, 1843, stopping at Louisville to sever his official connection with the Banner and Pioneer, tho he frequently contributed to it thereafter. The journey was marred by two incidents: on the first day he was robbed by a fellow passenger of $62.50; at the landing at Wheel-

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[7]Babcock, Memoir, 310; Baptist Memorial, I (1842); Draper Mss.,171
[8]Babcock, Memoir, 214.
[9]Brown, Hist. Am. Bap. Pub. Soc., 134.

ing he fell down the stairs and cut his head severely. On April 17, he reached Philadelphia and began an investigation of the affairs of the publication society. The work for the remainder of the year consisted of reorganization of the society that it might furnish the people a broader and better class of reading, and of visiting various state and local associations and benevolent society meetings, to show the people the value of the publication society's work and its need of their hearty support.[10]

In December Peck started for Illinois with the double purpose of visiting his family and of extablishing depositories for the society's publications at St. Louis and Alton. The Shepherdess, on which he was traveling, was wrecked by a snag in the river near the mouth of Cahokia Creek and several passengers were drowned. It was a bitter cold day and after he reached the shore Peck had to walk about a mile without shoes before coming to a house. He always considered the wreck as the narrowest escape of his life and was grateful to escape as he did, tho his feet were frozen and he was confined to his home for some time thereafter. During this time he prepared a memorial to Congress, embodying the facts of the wreck, and urging that body to grant an appropriation for the removal of snags and obstructions to navigation in the western rivers. This memorial, says Babcock, was received with favor by Congress and a liberal appropriation was made for the purpose.[11]

After a ten weeks stay in the West he again went to

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[10] Babcock, Memoir, 321-326.
[11] Ibid., 331.

Philadelphia. The great work of the year was his advocacy of the raising of a fund of fifty thousand dollars in five years. The plan was adopted at the anniversary of the society and one thousand dollars was there pledged. In the fall he hurried west to attend the state conventions in Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee. Several weeks were spent in the last named state in extending the work there. Before he left Peck paid a visit to his old friend the ex-President General Jackson.[12] While the work of the society bore quire heavily upon him, he was ever on the lookout for material on subjects in which he was interested. In 1844 he was thus slowly making preparation to write a life of Daniel Boone, a sketch of J. Vardeman and a history of Illinois.[13]

Probably the greatest work which he did for the society in 1845 was in his suggestions which led to the colportage system. He thought that travelling ministers might be paid one hundred dollars a year by the society and receive a percentage on sales of the society's literature. The plan seemed so practical that it was put into operation at once and is still used by the American Baptist Publication Society.[14]

The issues which were rending the county politically at this time had their effects on various institutions. There was some talk of separating into northern and southern publication

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[12]Babcock, Memoir, 332.

[13]Draper Mss., 1Z2.

[14]Brown, Hist. Am. Bap. Pub. Soc., 134.

societies on account of difference on the slavery question. Peck vigorously opposed this and spent the winter in the Carolinas and Georgia in an effort to reconcile the two divisions, but without much success.[15] On this southern trip he made the acquaintance of T. W. Haynes, editor of the Carolina Baptist, and at the latter's request, agreed to furnish some occasional sketches for the paper. None were sent however until 1846 when there appeared in the paper on May 29, an article by him entitled "The Early Baptist History of Mississippi".[16]

In September, 1845, Peck submitted his resignation to the board of the publication society, assigning this reason: "I think the society can now be made to prosper, with such a secretary as Rev. T. S. Malcom would make; and my presence is very necessary in Illinois, both for my family and the churches".[17] When his year was ended therefore, he closed his work, and on May 6, 1846, took final leave of the scenes and duties which for three years had so fully engrossed his time and energies. He was now almost fifty-seven years old and it is not unlikely that the traveling of thousands of miles each year, which he had been doing, was a labor from which he anxiously sought relief. In a letter to Lyman C. Draper, written January 23, 1846, he said that after closing his work in Philadelphia he hoped to spend his time at his "own domicile", engaged in missionary work among

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[15]Babcock, Memoir, 339.

[16]The Carolina Baptist, I, no. 11, (July, 1846)

[17]Babcock Memoir, 339; Draper Mss., 1Z3.

the churches in his immediate neighborhood, and in exploring, and writing western history.[18]

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[18] Draper Mss., 1Z3.

CHAPTER X

LITERARY AND OTHER WORKS (1846-1853)

The list of "societies" with which Peck was affiliated would be incomplete without mentioning the historical societies. The first of these was organized on Saturday, December 8, 1827, at Vandalia, by "a number of gentlemen, chiefly members of the bench and bar of the Supreme Court then in session", and took the name "The Antiquarian and Historical Society of Illinois". It lived only some three or four years, but in that time enrolled as members practically all the prominent men of the state.[1]

The next organization of this sort took place at Upper Alton in July, 1843. On February 11, 1847, the legislature granted this body a charter under the name, "The Illinois Literary and Historical Society", with Cyrus Edwards as president and John M. Peck as one of the secretaries.[2] It was located at Shurtleff College, meeting there on the same day as, or the day before, the College commencement each year. Its main object was to collect and file facts for the use of future historians.[3] In 1858 the constitution and by-laws were revised and the name changed to "The Illinois Historical Society".[4] Peck was connected with it until his death.

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[1] Ill. State Hist. Soc., Jour., II, no. 3, 77 et seq.; Ill. State Hist. Soc., Trans., 1906, pp. 188, 189, 310.

[2] Laws of Illinois

[3] Flagg Scrap Book, I, Letter to editor Alton Courier, signed "S.Y.M.", probably, 1857.

[4] Ibid., II. Mss. copy of the constitution and by-laws.

Peck's most active period as an author dates from the time when he closed his work with the American Baptist Publication Society. In the winter of 1845-1846, Dr. Jared Sparks asked him to prepare a life of Daniel Boone for Sparks' Library of American Biographies.[5] Peck had heard and read of Boone since his boyhood and in December, 1818, he visited him at his home on the Missouri river, about seventy-five miles from its mouth.[6] He learned much about Boone's life from the conversation that day and had gathered much documentary material on his life in the years intervening till 1846. It was with pleasure, then, that he accepted Dr. Sparks' offer, and probably no person living was so well able to write the life as he.[7] Part of the summer he spent in the "Boone Lick Country" where Boone had lived in Missouri, getting data from Boone's daughters who still lived there and from former nieghbors of the old hunter and pioneer.[8] Many of the stories told about Boone were without foundation and he had to sift the true from the false. By November the life was finished and forwarded to Sparks. His satisfaction with it was expressed to Peck in these words: "I have read a large part of it, and I do think it remarkably well adapted to its object. It exhibits thorough research in ascertaining the incidents of Boone's life; and the sketches of Western manners and the habits of backwoodsmen which are interspersed are drawn with spirit and add much to

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[5] Draper Mss., 1Z23.
[6] Babcock, Memoir, 126.
[7] Draper Mss., 1Z3.
[8] Babcock, Memoir, 341.

the interest and value of the work".[9]

As has been seen, Peck was a rapid writer, and he did not take a great deal of time in the composition of the biography, but he had been studying Boone's life for years and the work shows that he wrote in a very careful and critical manner. The biography "though short, is one of the best, showing much original research and thought".[10] The book when printed, in April, 1847, contained about two hundred pages. By his contract with Dr. Sparks he received one dollar per page for it.[11] From the nature of the work it is one of the two out of all his writings which will live the longest. The Gazetteers and Emigrant Guides exerted a much greater influence on the history of the state, but soon became obsolete and of little value except to the student of history.

During this time Peck was at work also on a history of Illinois for which he had begun to gather material some years before. On December 17, 1844, he wrote to Lyman C. Draper in regard to it, that he was "gleaning materials as opportunities offer. I intend to make a labored and somewhat voluminous work of that and take time for it". On January 23, 1846, however, he wrote: "I am much inclined to think my 'Illinois History' projected some years since may turn out a General History of the Western Valley".[12]

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[9] Draper Mss., 1Z6.
[10] Miner, Daniel Boone Bibliography, 27.
[11] Draper Mss., 1Z6.
[12] Ibid., 1Z2 and 1Z3.

He was thus quite closely following out his determination to devote his time to writing, and to religious work near his home. Thru 1846-1847 he was pastor at Troy, Bethel, and Edwardsville.[13] In 1847 he delivered the Commencement address at the College, taking as his subject, "Dr. Shurtleff". He was frequently called upon to deliver addresses and lectures, and wrote many short articles for newspapers and periodicals; he interested himself in the African colonization cause, wrote some very thoro articles on the effect of western climate on pulmonary diseases, gave plans and suggestions to the home and foreign mission boards, corresponded with people in Ireland on the facilities and advantages of transferring their starving population to the fertile prairies of the West, was a candidate for election to the constitutional convention of 1847, and, in short, showed himself a broad and public minded man in every way.[14] In November, 1847, he accepted the pastorate of the Belleville church, with an agreement to give a lecture on "Historical or other matter" each Saturday night.[15]

The Illinois Literary and Historical Society in 1847 made him chairman of a committee to prepare a "History of Illinois" for the 1848 meeting. Such a work would, of course, be shorter than the one he had planned, but he acceded and planned to write such an epitomised history as would make a volume about

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[13]Babcock, Memoir, 343.
[14]Babcock, Memoir, 342.
[15]Draper Mss., 1Z7.

twice the size of his Life of Boone.[16] Probably he never wrote it, for October 10, 1848, he wrote to Lyman C. Draper, "After getting my crop secured, I shall shut myself up and labor in my workshop during the winter on my 'Illinois History'."[17] On September 17, 1850, he wrote, "My 'History of Illinois' is worked up in the 'Annals'".[18] In the latter part of 1847 Peck began a series of articles for the Missouri Republican, on Daniel Boone and other pioneers, and another series on the History of Slavery in Illinois for the National Era at Washington.[19] In 1848 he wrote a series on early Illinois history for the Illinois Journal of Springfield.[20]

A very good insight into his ideas of history and biography and of his historical methods - which from the results of his work were much above the average for his time,[21] may be obtained from a part of the letter written to Draper on January 3, 1848.

> Very few persons who make the attempt have any idea of a History, or a Biography. Proper History is a complete portraiture of the body politic whether the whole world, the Church, the Jews, an empire, nation, province, state, city, town or family. All its parts, and at all periods of its existence, or for the period pretended to be given, should be set out in all and just proportion, with such extraneous events as have influence of forming and moulding this body politic. A biography is the history of a single person, with such connecting events as will explain and set forth his habits and character, like the background, light and shade of a correct portrait. Were a professed anatomist to gather a mass of human fragments, out of due proportion, as a dozen legs, an arm, 3 or 4 heads, and mutilated portions of the trunk, put them together and say "I have made a man", the unnatural and unsightly monster would resemble exactly at least three-fourths of our "Histories" and "Biographies". A historian and biographer must have the genius of an artist - he

[16] Draper Mss., 1 Ź 7.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Draper Mss., 1Ź10. The "Annals" referred to were the Annals of the West written in 1850.

must create - not a piece of fancy work, but a real embodiment - a perfect appearance of the object he professes to delineate. A state is a body politic, and a correct History of it, bears a perfect similitude to the portrait of an existing man. The same idea should be kept in view in biography.[22]

When Dr. Lynd left the Second Baptist church of St. Louis at the close of 1848, Peck agreed to supply until a new pastor was secured. The people evidently were satisfied with the supply, for a successor to Dr. Lynd was not chosen till October, 1849. Besides taking up this pastorate, he at the same time became editor of the Western Watchman, which work he continued for over a year and a half. Thus he was in St. Louis during the great fire and the epidemic of cholera, but amidst all these troubles, he was able to pay off a twelve thousand dollar meeting house debt on his church there.[23]

In September, 1849, James H. Perkins persuaded Peck to undertake the revision of the former's Annals of the West. By May 15, 1850, the book was finished. The new edition of thirty-five hundred copies, contained two hundred pages of additional matter over the first and included much material from Peck's hitherto unpublished and original sources which he had intended to incorporate in his history of Illinois. Mr. Lyman C. Draper of the Wisconsin Historical Society, had pointed out to Perkins a few errors in the first edition; these and many others Peck

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19Draper Mss., 1Z7.
20Ibid., 1Z8
21His methods of criticism are shown thruout the letters to Draper, in his discussions of incidents in the lives of Boone and George Rogers Clark.
22Draper Mss. 1Z7.
23Ibid., 1Z9.

corrected. A comparison of this volume with other works on western and Illinois history written about this time, shows that Peck was far in advance of his contemporaries in his methods. The extensive use of foot-notes and the giving of references, (which plan he also used in his Life of Boone) was practically a device of his own. The Annals ranks in value with the biography of Boone, and the two constitute his chief contribution in the form of printed books.[24]

Shortly after finishing the Annals, Peck conceived the idea of writing a large work on "The Moral Progress of the Mississippi Valley", which should give the history of all religious denominations in the Valley up to 1850, and of Sunday Schools, schools and colleges, tract societies and all benevolent institutions. Such a work would be monumental; the field was virgin and Peck possessed great quantities of data on the subject, beside his own experience. He planned to make it very full and complete and to give three years to its execution. The first year was to be spent in indexing and collating his material, thus learning what was lacking; the second, in correspondence and travel to fill up what was wanting; and the third, in preparing it for the press.[25]

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[24] Draper Mss., 1Z9 and 1Z10; Annals of the West, 1-50; Davidson and Stuve, History of Illinois, 355

[25] Draper Mss., 1Z9; at the same time he contemplated bringing out a small fifty-cent book on the "Germans and German Missions", but there is no evidence to show that the idea ever materialized. See Draper Mss. 1Z9.

During the late summer of 1850 Peck was ill for sometime, and, realizing his health precluded his doing much more active church work, he decided to sell his farm and move to Upper Alton, near to the college, and devote the remainder of his days to the carrying out of his literary projects. Satisfactory arrangements for the sale were not made, however, and Rock Spring continued to be his home until his death. For several weeks in the winter of 1851 he was sick in Springfield and after his recovery he wrote, "The honest truth is I am an old, wornout, broken down man."[26] On his return from Springfield, after much urging, he consented to become pastor of the Bethel church, the oldest Protestant church in Illinois, which position ho filled until the middle of October, 1853.[27] As might be inferred, the work on the religious history did not keep Peck from contributing frequently to periodicals. In the summer of 1851 he wrote an article of about 30 pages for the Christian Review on "The Annexation of Louisiana" besides historical sketches for the Missouri Republican and other papers.[28]

Near the close of 1851 Mr. Peck undertook "quite unexpectedly" a new work - The Mississippi River Illustrated. Two publishing houses in New York and London projected the work and planned to sell fifteen or twenty thousand copies of it in the

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[26]Draper Mss., 1Z10 and 1Z11.
[27]Babcock, Memoir, 341.
[28]Draper, Mss., 1Z12.

United States and Europe. It was to be a serial publication in quarto size appearing monthly, and consist of steel engraving illustrative of the river accompanied by several pages of historical and descriptive matter. Peck was to furnish all the latter. The first number appeared in January 1852 and illustrated the Itasca Lake region. The eighth number was sent to the publishers about December 1. It included the section from Burlington to the mouth of the Missouri.[29]

Toward the last of March, Peck wrote a chapter entitled "The Religions and Morals of Illinois prior to 1818", for Reynolds Pioneer History of Illinois. Probably such a sketch took but little time, as he had for years been writing and lecturing on that period. About this time also he contributed some stories of Indian legends to T. S. Arthur's Home Gazette "done up in true Indian style", as Peck said.[30]

Tho a distinctly western man, Peck had made his influence felt in the East and on the day in 1852 on which Francis Wayland, Caleb Cushing, Benjamin R. Curtis, Alexis de Toqueville and Francis Guizot were honored with the degree of Doctor of Laws by Harvard University, John Mason Peck, together with Andrew P. Peabody and Horace Bushnell received recognition from that great university by being awarded the degree of Doctor of Systematic Theology.[31] Perhaps none of these distinguished

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[29] Draper Mss., 1Z13.
[30] Ibid.; Reynolds, Pioneer History of Illinois, 253 et seq.
[31] Greene, Pioneers of Civilization in Illinois, 18, Babcock, Memoir, 350.

men appreciated the honor more than humble Peck who had risen from an inconspicuous position as a schoolmaster to that of a man known all over the United States for his wisdom and works, and this thru dogged persistence and a will which could not be broken.

He was even now a poor man and tho sixty three years old still had to fight the battle for existence. On March 27, 1852, he wrote that if some publisher would pay him the customary amount he could readily write the "Life and Times of Vardeman", the pioneer Baptist preacher;"but" he said, "having spent a vast amount of time in the vigor of my life, in writing for the benefit of others, I am now compelled in my old age to write where I can get the perquisite to pay some debts and meet current expenses".[32]

On November 18, occurred a calamity which must have almost broken the old man's heart. The Rock Spring Seminary building, about 150 yards from his house, contained his library of some eight to ten thousand volumes. A spark from the fireplace set the building on fire and it was burned, together with most of the books and papers it contained. This account in his diary shows both the magnitude of his loss and the spirit in which he met it. "An important branch of my labor for more than thirty years is wholly lost. My collection of files, papers, periodicals and other pamphlets, amounting to several thousand volumes . . . and my mineralogical collection from every part

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[32]Draper Mss., 1Z13.

of the country where I have traveled, thoroughly arranged and labeled, together with much other matter which I had intended for some public institution, to be preserved for generations to come - these can never be replaced. Well, it seems to me to be providential. I have done what I could and failed! I am afraid my materials are so destroyed that I can not obtain means to prepare my projected work on the Moral Progress of the Great Central Valley of the Western World. I can only say, the will of the Lord be done."[33]

His pecuniary loss he estimated at five thousand dollars with seven hundred dollars insurance on the building. He was not left wholly destitute in regard to books, however, as he kept all his diaries and journals, correspondence, association minutes, and the books he used most, in his dwelling house. His loss was a public one as he intended to leave the collection to some library, and the things lost, could not, in many instances, be replaced. The fire upset all his plans for the book on which he was then laboring. His indexing had shown that he possessed most of the needed material, but now four or five years' time would be required to travel, collect and copy, that the work which he considered the most important piece of writing of his life, might be completed.[34] Strong expressions of sympathy came to him from all parts of the country and many offers of books were made to help restock his depleted library, with the

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[33]Draper Mss. 1Z14; Babcock, Memoir, 349.
[34]Draper Mss, 1Z14.

result that he determined to avail himself of his friends kindnesses by making a trip to the Atlantic States to collect such books as were offered him.[35]

The most interesting work of the winter was some articles published in the Missouri Republican, on the "Explorations of the Mississippi Valley." In one of these he points out -and supports with evidence - that Cabeza da Vacas crossed the continent from the coast of Florida, where he was shipwrecked in 1528, to the Colorado River and thence to Mexico; thus, with his companions - 3 Spaniards and negro servant - crossing the Mississippi a dozen years before De Soto first saw it.[36]

Thru the winter also he corresponded with the board of the Baptist Publication Society and persuaded the members that a general Baptist historical society should be organized. They agreed to take the matter up at the anniversary meeting on May 4. On April 21, Peck set out on what was to prove his last tour of the east, and reached Philadelphia in season to see his plans for the historical society materialize. Probably few Baptists of today know that their historical society was founded thru the efforts of Dr. Peck. The trip was ended August 12 when he reached his home with an abundance of notes and large numbers of books which an appreciative East had been proud to present to him.[37]

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[35] Draper Mss., 1Z14 and 1Z16.
[36] Ibid., 1Z16.
[37] Ibid.

CHAPTER XI

ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY (1835-1858)

During the years when sentiment was crystalizing strongly either for or against the institution of salvery, it is natural to suppose that a man with as much independence of thought as Peck had, would have weighed the question and taken a positive stand; too, as a New Englander, as a vigorous opponent of the intriduction of slavery into Illinois in 1824 and, lastly, as a minister of the gospel, it is to be expected that this stand would be in opposition to slavery.

There is however, a somewhat prevalent idea that the reverse was true and that Peck in his later years was friendly toward, rather than opposed to, the institution. One historian has written thus about it: "Rev. John M. Peck, who had been an active opponent of the introduction of slavery into Illinois, was active in opposition to modern abolitionism, and was regarded as proslavery".[1] Lippincott, in his "Early Days in Madison County" wrote: "It is a matter of painful regret that when Elijah P. Lovejoy was doing what Mr. Peck had so nobly done in years agone, the latter, instead of joining in the noble work, threw his influence against him and when popular fury was rising against the faithful witness, Mr. Peck unintentionally and unconsciously, I am sure, pursued such a course as tended to fan the flame. And it is believed that even after that event he was on the conservative side rather than the progressive."[2] Ex-Governor Reynolds

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[1] Blanchard, Discovery and Conquest of the Northwest, 659.
[2] Lippincott, "Early Days in Madison County", no. 45.

writing after Peck's death said that Peck changed his feelings toward slavery as he came to see that the slaves were kindly treated, were better off as slaves than in any other state, and that the most harm was only in its influence on the whites.[3]

These directly imply inconsistency between his attitude in 1824 and during the period succeeding 1835. In this chapter is intended to bring out Peck's real position on the slavery question. The only thing which he fought in 1824 was the introduction of slavery into Illinois.[4] So far as is known he always opposed its extension into new territory.[5] His action then, was thoroughly consistent.

Lippincott's statement quoted above, is open to question as it was written some thirty years after the event took place. Much more trustworthy, it would seem, is the private diary which Peck kept and in which he recorded the events as they transpired, together with his personal ideas and comments. From this it is learned that he attended the various meetings in Alton of the summer of 1837. He describes the meeting in Hogan's store, on November 2, when Lyman Beecher's nine resolutions were presented and a committee appointed to report on them; the meeting next day with the committee's report and the new resolutions. These latter he considered a compromise between the two parties, not of principles but of persons, which in the end would secure the desired result without further trouble; while, on the other

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[3]Reynold's, Friendship's Offering, chap. 13.
[4]See Chapter IV.
[5]Reynolds, Friendship's Offering, chap. 21.

hand, trouble would result from the adoption of the Beecher resolutions.[6] Using them as a temporary peace measure, Peck was probably right, but a retrospect taken with knowledge of the succeeding twenty-five years shows that such a plan would only have postponed the issue. While it may be that Peck had a wrong view of the situation and of its necessities, he was in Edwardsville conducting a series of religious meetings when the riots took place, and so probably did not exert the unfavorable influence of which he has been accused.[7]

As has been seen, Peck was active in the work of the Colonization Society. He attended two of its meetings in Upper Alton at about the same time as the organization there of the Illinois Anti-slavery Society, in October, 1837. At each of these two meetings Cyrus Edwards, John M. Peck and Joel Parker made speeches, their object being it seems, "to forestall the Abolitionists".[8] Just what effect these meetings had in influencing the people of Alton against Lovejoy, it is difficult to estimate. The meetings, while open to the public, were attended only by those unquestionably opposed to the Abolitionists, considering them monomaniacs, whose principles if fully carried out, would break up all government, authority, and rule.[9] Both he and Parker have been accused of making at these Coloniza-

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[6]Babcock, Memoir, 275.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Tanner, The Martyrdom of Lovejoy, 136.
[9]Babcock, Memoir, 136.

tion Society meetings, such speeches as would cause the lower classes of the town to feel that they had the sanction of these leaders to make even violent opposition to the abolitionists.[10] It may be true that men of the mob which murdered Lovejoy were more active because they knew that Peck and these others wished the suppression of the abolitionists. Still, it is just to add, as did Lippincott, that what Peck said and did was done with honesty and sincerity and that if his words influenced the mob it was done "unintentionally and unconsciously".[11] The plainest statement of Peck's feeling toward slavery is that from his own pen on November 4, 1836. He wrote: "It is perhaps useless for us to repeat, what all our readers know, that we always have been, as we always expect to be, opposed to the principle and practice of slavery in every form, and have always been ready to unite in every lawful and feasible effort for its amelioration. We hope that the day is not far distant when all good men can take a successful stand against the evil."[12]

No one has accused Peck of desiring violence done the abolitionists. But what of his views which prompted the speeches above referred to? Arrayed on the same side with him were most of the great leaders - religious and political - o f the north; men who were opponents, too, of slavery.[13] The calm judgment of the present pronounces the abolitionists to have been fanatics

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[10]Tanner, The Martyrdom of Lovejoy, 136.
[11]Lippincott, "Early Days in Madison County," no. 45.
[12]Western Pioneer and Baptist Standard Bearer, n. s. I, no. 17.
[13]Hart, Slavery and Abolition, chap. 13.

and monomaniacs, even as Peck did then.[14] "While these doctrines are to be justified from a point of view of an extreme idealism, the means for their realization, at first only indicated, but later boldly and widely expressed, were revolutionary, almost anarchic."[15]

In respect to the opinion that Peck was favorable to institution of slavery there is sufficient evidence to prove it groundless. During the campaign of 1864, Mr. D. L. Phillips, editor of the Illinois State Journal published the following statement.[16]

"Dr. Peck's ill health did not permit him to mingle much with the world after Douglas became the leader of the Calhoun conspiracy to make slavery the common law of the land; but those who enjoyed the privilege of occasional interviews with him, or with whom he maintained a correspondence, will testify to the warmth and unqualified manner in which he denounced the whole proceeding in Congress, the course of Douglas and the Administration. We have now before us, one of the many letters which he wrote to his friends to the same purport, and which we are permitted to lay before our readers. We trust every honest patriotic citizen in the State will read it during the progress of the present canvass, and treasure up the truths and warnings which it embodies. The following is the letter:

Rock Spring, Ill.
June 6, 1856.

D. L. Phillips, Esq.

Dear Sir:-

Seeing your name in the Alton Courier announced by "People's Convention", at Bloomington as candidates for Presidential elector in the 9th Congressional District has stirred me up

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[14]Burgess, Middle Period, 248.
[15]Burgess, Middle Period, 246.
[16]Illinois State Journal, 1864.

to write. I have never before seen our country in such a dangerous position, and when so great a probability existed that our Union will be rent. I have been in the habit of reading newspapers and other public documents on both - and all sides, about three score years, and know what I speak.

The desperate faction or combination of men who make up the present administration, are certainly a set of unprincipled villians. Like their great prototype they would rather "reign in hell than serve in heaven". They call themselves "National Democrats," and yet in reference to the slavery question, intercourse with foreign nations, and the principles they avow about Kansas - they have disavowed, repudiated and "nullified" every principle on those topics held and maintained by Washington, Jefferson, the Adamses, Madison, Monroe, and Andrew Jackson.

They have adopted the traitorous principles of the South Carolina nullifiers of 1832, whom Gen. Jackson threatened to hang, under the second section of the military code. The arch traitor, John C. Calhoun, was the first American in public life to broach the abominable heresy that "the Constitution carries slavery with it into all the Territories of the United States". Richardson and Douglas, like the Indian in Missouri have "talked out of two mouths". Last year both pretended to hold to the old doctrine of our fathers, that slavery can not exist where there is no positive or municipal law. Now they go the whole length of the Calhous doctrine. I, by no means, wholly approve of the course pursued by the "Free State men", in relation to Kansas. But no man, unless he is a desperado, can approve of the opposite fection. The leading Southern papers (Richmond Enquirer and a dozen others) are calling for a revival of the African Slave trade, and even arguing the policy and right of making slaves of the white race, the Irish, Germans and all poor American born families. But I must stop.

If I was in your position, and the vigor of life, as I was in 1823-4, I would have an organization in every county, and a "club" in every precinct. Organize, organize. Making stump speeches does well enough to arouse the people but quiet and private arrangements will produce the votes.

Let me hear from you, and how matters and things go in your region.

Yours truly,

J. M. Peck.

Here is expressed the attitude which all his friends knew him to maintain. It was the same which he had shown just

twenty years before in the Alton riots.

On January 26, 1851, at the request of the legislature, Peck delivered at the state house in Springfield, a lecture entitled "The Duties of American Citizens". The country was just then wrought up over the enforcement of the fugitive slave law. In the lecture no attempt was made to justify slavery or this law but it was shown that the law was constitutional; that certain prominent men had counseled open resistance to its enforcement; that such action constituted anarchy; that no so-called "higher law" conflicts with any citizen's duty of obedience to the constitution and laws of the land; and, that "all political reforms in our government, either in a State or the nation, can only be rightfully effected by the slow, but sure and safe process of the ballot box."[17] Here was a sane and patriotic discussion of a public question and all clear thinking men today must agree that Peck was right. So long as the Fugitive Slave Law was on the statute books of the United States and was declared constitutional by the Supreme Court, it was the duty of all good citizens, at least not to hinder its enforcement. Constitutional methods are provided whereby legislation displeasing to the people may be repeated. Any violent means of securing its nullification is anarchy.

Another piece of evidence shows that till his death Peck was opposed to slavery and wished that after his death he might help do away with it. In his will he left part of his property to the Colonization Society for the purpose of coloniz-

[17]Peck, The Duties of American Citizens.

ing negroes in Africa.[18]

As Reynolds said, Peck in later life came to believe that the slaves were quite well treated, and in many instances were better off than they would be in a state of freedom.[19] He believed the institution to be an evil, however, and conscientiously and consistently opposed it. The fact that he was a minister and yet opposed radical measures against slavery has probably caused many to consider him a pro-slavery man.

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[18]Reynolds, Friendship's Offering, chap. 13.
[19]Ibid., Babcock, Memoir.

CHAPTER XII

CLOSING YEARS (1853-1858)

After Dr. Peck's return from the east he planned to divide his time between preaching, working on his "Moral Progress" and on a new series of books to which he gave the name "Pioneer Books". These latter were intended for Sunday School Libraries and for family reading, and were to contain from one hundred fifty to two hundred small pages. By September of 1853 he had three such in view: "The Indian Captive; or John Tanner among the Chippewas", "Father Clark; or the Pioneer Preacher", and "The Life and Times of J. Vardeman", on the first of which he was already at work.[1]

The Baptist Church at Covington, Kentucky, opposite Cincinnati, was without a pastor and during the last months of this year repeatedly urged Dr. Peck to take the place. Some of his friends feared that he was not able to endure the work of a city church of some two hundred members, but Peck thought that living near the church in Covington as compared with the drive he had to make thru any kind of weather from his home to Bethel church, would more than compensate for the extra work. So he accepted and near the close of the year took up the work in the new field.[2] He had been offered one thousand dollars per year salary, but replied that eight hundred dollars was all he would accept, and that the other two hundred dollars should be kept to

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[1] Draper Mss., 1Z16.
[2] Babcock, Memoir, 351.

pay ministers who might be called to help in special meetings.[3]

The Covington church in its time without a pastor had become considerably rundown and disheartened. Peck at once set about in his strenuous way to revive the interest of the members in the work. About the first of February a series of extra meetings was begun in which he attempted to preach each evening. His feeble body was no match for his vigorous mind and in a few days he broke down completely. For several days he lay ill and Dr. Wise,- his physician,- gave up hopes of his recovery. He never lost faith himself, however, telling everybody that he would soon be well again, and before long he began to grow stronger, almost it would seem,by the power and determination of his own indomitable will.[4]

On March 19, he resigned, having decided that he must give up preaching altogether, and on April 20 he set out for his home at Rock Spring,[5] where, as he wrote to Mr. Draper, he intended to stay the remainder of his days.[6] He was yet weak from his recent illness, which was not alone congestion of the liver (which had troubled him so much), but also a serious affection of the lungs, from which Dr. Wise had said no man of his age and enfeebled constitution could entirely[7] recover. This, however, did not deter him from planning further literary labors. Elder J. B. Meachum,a slave who had purchased his own freedom and preached in the negro Baptists church in St. Louis

[3]P.S. Bush, Covington, Ky.,to Babcock in Babcock,Memoir, 353.
[4]Babcock, Memoir, 354.
[5]Ibid.
[6]Draper Mss., 1Z19.
[7]Babcock,Memoir, 352.

for some 20 years, had died in February.[8] Peck had worked with him in the city and now felt that much good might result among the colored people if a memoir of their late leader be published, so he set about it and brought out a small volume of some 80 pages.[9] About this same time Joshua Bradley, the first principal of Rock Spring Seminary was living in St. Paul in extreme poverty. He was over 80 years old, and having spent his life in the service of others had not provided for his own future. To help him in his infirmity and need, and enlist the aid of kind friends, Peck now felt called, and so wrote a sketch of his life for the Christian Repository of Louisville, Kentucky.[10]

About the middle of August the "Life of Vardeman", so long before projected, was finished and in October published in the Christian Repository.[11] Arrangements had been made while he was writing it, for its publication by Rev. Dr. Sprague in his Annals of the American Pulpit,[12] and this was subsequently done in 1860.[13]

Meanwhile he wrote also an article on the Presbyterians of West Pennsylvania for the Christian Review and a "Sketch of John Leland" for the October number of the Baptist Memorial. These were specimens from his "Moral Progress".[14] Considerable

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[8] Draper, Mss., 1Z19.
[9] Draper, Mss., 1Z19; Peck, Life of John B. Meachum.
[10] Draper, Mss. 1Z19; "Rev. Joshua Bradley" in Christian Repository, V, 231
[11] Draper, Mss. 1Z22.
[12] Ibid., 1Z21.
[13] Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit.
[14] Draper, Mss., 1Z22.

time had been spent too in business affairs and in supervising the erection of a small house on his farm. So with all these other things interferring, the Life of Father Clark, begun some years before was not completed and published until late in 1854.[15]

The "Reminiscences of Hooper Warren" appearing in December, 1854, in the Free West, of which Warren was an associate editor, seemed to Peck so erroneous in many ways that he could not resist the temptation to write and correct the mistakes. On April 12, April 26, and May 3, 1855, appeared in the same paper three letters from him, on the topics respectively, "Early Illinois History", "The Old Anti-Slavery Party", and "The Anti-Slavery Contest in Illinois", setting forth what he considered the truth in regard to the subjects treated by Warren.[16]

Peck was probably more nearly right than Warren as he supported his statements by quite reliable evidence. At any rate, whether right or wrong, he had a convincing way in his writing as any one may see by reading his arguments on any point of controversy. He enjoyed a very great confidence in his own ideas, and in his later years was prone to feel that where he and others differed he was right and they were wrong.[17] Perhaps this should not be attributed either to egotism or childishness, however, as all his life he had had to take the lead

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[15]Draper, Mss., 1Z22.
[16]Free West, V, 1855.
[17]Ibid., Draper, Mss., 1Z24.

and much of his success, as has been seen, was due to the fact that he had confidence in himself and went ahead.

In June, 1855, Peck wrote Draper that his proposed book, "The Indian Captive", was postponed,as its subject - John Tanner - had created a great stir by becoming a Unitarian, and Peck thought it expedient to delay the publication until the public mind was quieted down on the question.[18] There is no evidence at hand to show that the book was ever printed.

He had conceived a new volume for his "Pioneer" set, however, so the work ahead was not lessened. This was to receive the name "Incidents of Pioneer Life", and contain biographical articles and sketches. In 1847-48 he had contributed to the Missouri Republican, a series of articles under the heading, "Sketches of Kentucky Pioneers". His plan was to publish these in book form under the above title, but revised and written in a familiar style for boys and girls to read.[19]

In January, 1856, Peck wrote to Rufus Babcock, his long-time eastern friend,soliciting him to take charge of such unpublished manuscripts as should be left at his death, together with his journals and correspondence,and prepare them for the press.[20]

For over 47 years Mr. and Mrs. Peck had shared together such joys and sorrows as life had brought them; in his many and severe illnesses his wife had nursed him back to health; in his

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[18] Draper Mss.,1Z24.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Babcock, Memoir, 356.

discouragement over failure or opposition she stood back of him to cheer and encourage. Together in the last of June they went to Alton to attend the Shurtleff Commencement. Twice in the preceding nine months Peck had broken down in trying to help the college when its finances were in an extremely hazardous condition and Mrs, Peck feared that he might again overtax himself on this occasion, so accompanied him. It was her last trip from home, however, as shortly after her return she was attacked by an intermittent fever. This left her in a few days, but her strength did not return and on October 24, 1856, she died. Two days later she was buried in Rock Spring Cemetery, but Peck was too ill to leave the house.[21]

Peck's appreciation of her is best given in his own words. "The wife I have loved was an extraordinary wife and mother, and I think in justice to her memory, and as an illustration of my poor labors, I ought to devote one reminiscence to her, as a remarkable helpmate in all my labors and efforts. I have never thought it expedient and proper to write or speak in praise of my late dear wife while living; but now she has finished her course, it ought to be known in what sense, and what extent she was the help-mate, preeminently, in every department of labor her husband undertook. I now assure all my friends that had not that woman possessed the principles, and been the wise, prudent, self-denying head, and government of my family

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[21]This account is derived from a letter from Peck to Babcock the next month. Babcock, Memoir, 356.

she was, I could not have made half the sacrifices, and performed half the services my kind friends have attributed to me".[22]

Peck's health continued poor and he at length abandoned all work on the "Pioneer Books" and the "Moral Progress of the Mississippi Valey".[24] On the latter he had done much in the way of collecting and arranging materials since the fire. While in the East during the summer of 1853, he had issued from Rock Spring, a circular describing the general plan of this book, telling his great loss thru the burning of Rock Spring Seminary, and calling upon a generous people who were interested in the project, to furnish him material and correspond with him for the purpose of furnishing facts.[25] This appeal met with a pleasing response, but attention to other writings, and frequent sicknesses had given him but little time for writing on his great work. He now saw that most of the work of authorship must be left to another, and he set about arranging his materials and manuscripts in the best form for the one to whom he should leave them. He then began writing reminiscences to cover sixty years of his life. Part of these were to be published in periodicals, but the large part were to be left for a posthumous work, to be published by his old friend,Rufus Babcock.[26]

Thru the winter and spring of 1856 he was much troubled with his "old enemy", congestion of the liver, but wrote several

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22This account is derived from a letter from Peck to Babcock the next month. Babcock, Memoir, 356.
24Draper, Mss., 1Z25.
25Ibid., 1Z17.
26Ibid., 1Z25; Babcock, Memoir of John Mason Peck.

articles for the Illinois State Journal.[27] These were historical and biographical sketches which he had intended to publish in the proposed series of"Pioneer Books", but which he now realized could best be preserved for the future historian by his getting them into print in the columns of newspapers.[28]

Peck had never visited Mr. Draper at his home in Madison. As summer came on, however, and he looked forward to the hot weeks of August with the resulting customary depression of his health, he decided to visit in the north during the hot season.[29] Accordingly he set forth about July 20, 1857, traveling by river to Galena where a week was spent in visiting his children and grand-children who lived there.[30] Following this came several days of delightful visiting with Draper at Madison, where the old pioneers exchanged reminiscences and compared notes on many events of western history.[31]

From Madison he journeyed to Chicago. His impression of that city is interesting and also shows that he realized the mad extent to which the people of the country were rushing in a financial way. He wrote: "Chicago in every respect is a great humbug. They are now building many hundreds of light, flashy, fancy buildings 5 and 6 stories high, all for show - nothing firm, strong or permanent about them, and on the most expensive credit system ever known or tried. Everything you see is deception, trick, humbug".[32]

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[27]Draper, Mss. 1Z26 & 27.
[28]Ibid., 1Z26.
[29]Ibid., 1Z27.
[30]Babcock, Memoir, 358.
[31]Draper, Mss., 1Z32 & 33.
[32]Ibid., 1Z28.

From Chicago he went to Cass County, Michigan, to visit his late wife's sister, her children, and a dozen persons who forty-two years before were his students in Duchess County, New York. Returning, a few more days were spent in Chicago, then another week in Galena, and on September 3 he took the cars for home via Decatur.[33]

Writing Draper after his return he said: "We reached Rock Spring Friday night at 7:00 o'clock and to all appearances well and vigorous. In two days I had a bilious attack, and in a few days it turned to a sever congestion of the liver. A course of medicine and sore mouth followed, and I am now as far back as I was last March. This traveling for health is not what it is cracked up to be".[34]

This was the last letter written Draper in a correspondence carried on for but two months less than 16 years. Thruout the autumn and winter, periods of alternating illness and partial recovery marked his health. His friends seemed to realize as Dr. Peck himself did, that he could not live much longer, and he had frequent visits from ex-Governor Reynolds, his dear old friend James E. Welch who had come to Illinois with him in 1817, President Read of Shurtleff, Cyrus Edwards, and others. The last entry in his diary - which had been kept faithfully since his boyhood - was made on February 25, 1858.[35]

33Draper, Mss., 1 Z28.
34Ibid.
35Babcock, Memoir, 358.

From that day on he scarcely left his bed but to conduct the morning family worship. On Sunday March 14, a few minutes before nine in the evening he breathed his last.[36] For thirty-six hours afterward the rain came down incessantly[37] as tho the very heavens mourned for the departed.

He was buried in Rock Spring Cemetery. Rev. James Lemen conducted the funeral service, speaking from these appropriate words: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith". Twenty-nine days later his body was removed to the Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis.[38] The spot is marked by a beautiful shaft of white marble, but his greatest and most enduring monument is the result of his work for the moral uplift of the great central valley in which he labored for forty years, not for himself, but for the glory of God and his fellow man.

> He is gone who seemed so great -
> Gone: but nothing can bereave him
> Of the force he made his own
> Being here, and we believe him
> Something far advanced in state,
> And that he wears a truer crown
> Than any wreath that man can weave him.
>
> Tennyson,- In Memoriam.

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[36]Babcock, Memoir, 359. Henry Martin Peck to Draper, March 19, 1858 (Draper Mss., 1Z29) said his father died the 15th but from the details given by Babcock it seems that the latter was correct, especially since the 14th was Sunday.

[37]Babcock, Memoir, 360.

[38]Ibid.

So went out the light of one of the most useful lives that the Mississippi Valley has ever known.[39] For forty years John Mason Peck lived in the Valley, seeing and helping largely to direct, the onward and upward progress of western civilization. In missions, in Sunday-schools, in temperance and educational work he was a pioneer; in newspaper work and authorship he achieved nation-wide fame; in every line tending to social advancement he was a leader.

In politics Dr. Peck leaned toward the Whigs, tho not violently, and with no bitterness toward other parties. He voted generally as he thought right, without reference to party. Thus he supported the administration of John Quincy Adams, voted for Martin Van Buren and Richard M. Johnston in 1836, and for Millard Fillmore in 1856. Locally he was a supporter of Daniel P. Cook, Ninian Edwards, and John Reynolds.[40]

The study of all available material concerning Peck does not reveal evidence that in his whole career he had a single enemy. Opponents he had in numbers, to be sure, but they were opponents, not enemies. Those who differed with him, tho they might believe him ever so wrong, could not impute to him any dishonest motive or questionable purpose. In his sincerity and earnestness and mildness he won their respect, even tho he failed to convince them of their mistakes. An example in point is that of

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[39] Cf. Missouri Republican, March, 1858.
[40] Reynolds: Friendships Offering. Chap. 21.

a neighbor, an anti-mission minister, who had opposed Peck bitterly both on that subject and in politics, but who summoned him to officiate at the marriage of his daughter. After the ceremony he handed Mr. Peck fifty dollars as his fee saying that it was done because of his special respect for him.[41] Unlike many of the anti-slavery leaders in the fight of 1823-1824, Peck outlived the partisan animosities of that period and won the cordial recognition of his former opponents.[42]

Peck was not a brilliant man, perhaps, but he was always a student and at his death his knowledge covered a very broad field. Indeed, there were few subjects upon which he could not converse with intelligence and understanding. He "did not possess any marked or decided taste or talent for either reading or writing poetry, and did not, in either thought or act, indulge in the pleasing visions of the fanciful or emotional subject".[43]

Singular as it may seem Peck neglected the education of his own children. They received a common school training only.[44] During the continuance of Rock Spring Seminary only one child, a daughter, was old enough for higher schooling. After the school reopened at Alton. Peck was usually in financial straits and perhaps was thus unable to keep his children in school. He was so busy working for the rest of humanity that his

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[41]Babcock, Memoir, 387.
[42]Greene, Pioneers of Civilization in Illinois, p. 18.
[43]Reynolds, Friendship's Offering, 8.
[44]Ibid. Chap. 10.

own family was neglected.

During his busy life Peck visited every state east of the Mississippi except Alabama and Florida, and the tier of states west of that river, as well. In all these states he had friends and when he died, at the age of sixty-eight years, thruout the land were those who felt their loss and mourned his going. Thru the years that he had lived, he had done a great work; and the body that could so seldom find time for rest on earth passed on to the land where there is no toil, no sorrow and no pain.

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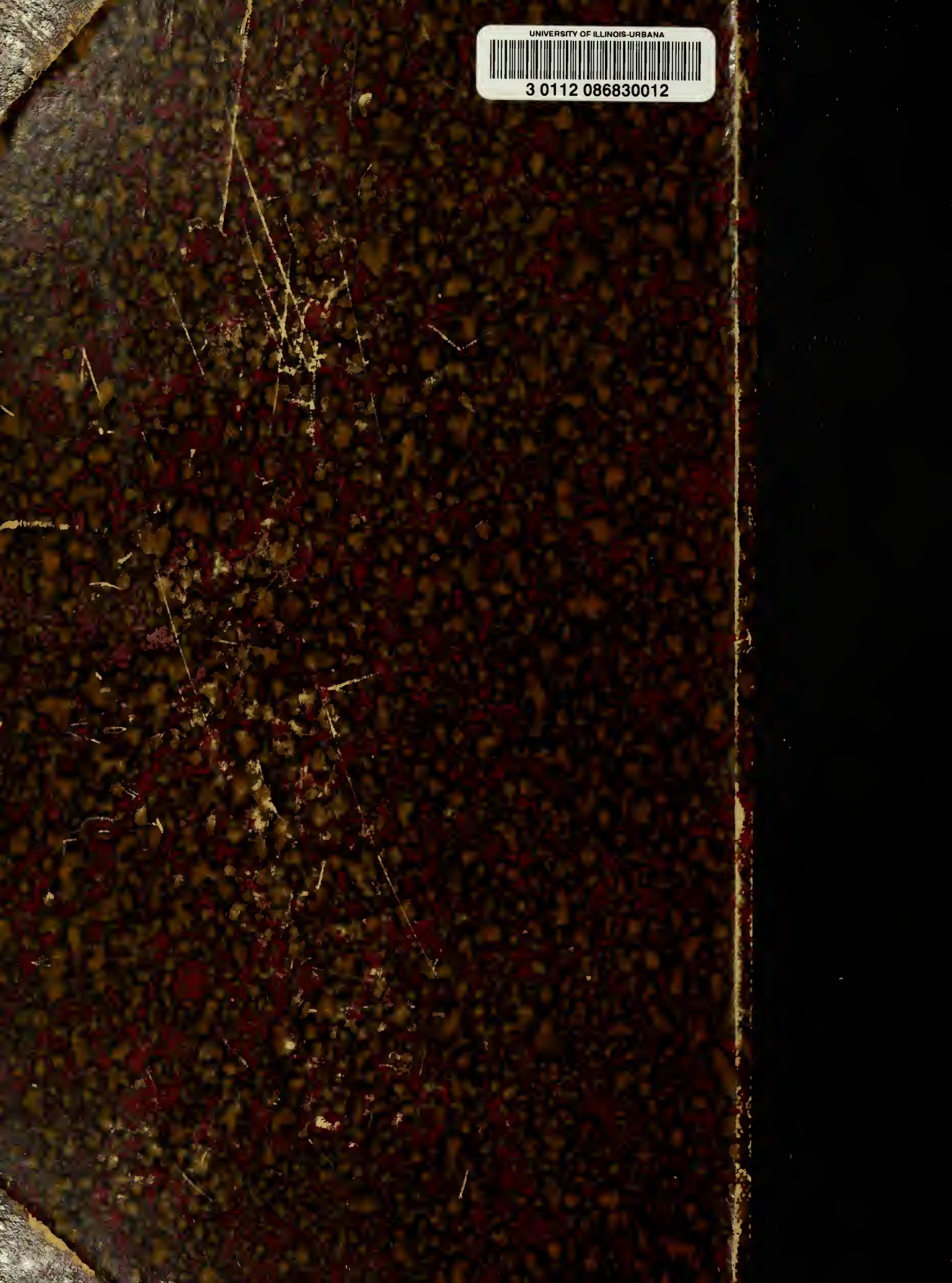
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